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Consumerism in the Eighties

A National Survey of
Attitudes Toward the
Consumer Movement

Conducted for
Atlantic Richfield Company
by Louis Harris and Associates, Inc.

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Study No. 822047

Conducted for
Atlantic Richfield Company

Fieldwork: October 1982

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Foreword

Atlantic Richfield's decision to underwrite *Consumerism in the Eighties* has its roots in marketing plans that were made nearly a decade ago.

In the mid-1970s, ARCO Petroleum Products Company began preparing for the marketing environment that would follow the lifting of emergency federal regulations that were imposed in 1973 to govern the sale of motor fuels. The Company reasoned that the combination of declining demand and the cost of crude oil on the world market would require an approach to gasoline marketing unlike any that had been tried before.

According to ARCO marketing executives, the era after 1973 would require responding to specific segments of the consuming public. ARCO chose to focus on those segments that are especially concerned with value and price.

The Company pursued cost-cutting efficiency in its refining and marketing operations and took other steps to reduce the price of gasoline at the pump.

The step that generated the most attention was the Company's announcement in 1982 that it was eliminating its gasoline credit card. Following the announcement, consumer movement leaders, government officials, educators, reporters, and others came to ARCO with questions about the credit card decision and about the credit issue in general.

Company officials responded to those questions about the credit card decision and shared the results of research ARCO had commissioned prior to making the decision. But it soon became clear that there was a dearth of up-to-date information on public perceptions of the consumer movement and related issues.

To help fill that void, to enable ARCO to better understand the various consumer constituencies, and to make a contribution to the consumer movement, ARCO commissioned *Consumerism in the Eighties*. Representatives of consumer groups and agencies were invited to identify previously sampled data that they would like to have updated, as well as new topics that they would like to have investigated.

Consumerism in the Eighties is just one part of an active consumer affairs program at ARCO. Other activities have included ongoing dialogues with national consumer groups — on survey topics and other issues — and a nationwide series of local briefings on consumer credit cosponsored by ARCO and the Joint Council on Economic Education.

ARCO Petroleum Products Company

Introduction: By Louis Harris and Associates, Inc.

Consumerism in the Eighties, sponsored by ARCO, is an updated look at one of the country's most important — and most complex — topics. Consumerism has been a frequent topic of investigation by Louis Harris and Associates. In 1978 and 1981, the Harris *Perspective* examined consumer issues. In 1976, Harris conducted a landmark study of the consumer movement, *Consumerism at the Crossroads*, sponsored by Sentry Insurance. Approximately 40% of the questions for *Consumerism in the Eighties* are drawn from these earlier Harris studies and are repeated to measure trends. The remaining 60% are new questions, reflecting new issues and changing concerns in consumerism.

Consumerism in the Eighties was conducted in an atmosphere that is very different from that which prevailed when the earlier studies began. There is a new President, a new Congress, and a new national agenda. Some former legislative proposals have now become laws, and those laws have begun to generate both praise and criticism. Double-digit inflation, and then double-digit unemployment, have buffeted the American public, giving economic issues priority over many other issues, including consumerism. In addition, through years of noteworthy achievements and successes, the organized consumer movement has matured from an underdog cause to what may now have become an established force in the American system of interest group bargaining. In this new atmosphere there are many aspects of public opinion about consumer issues and the consumer movement that had not been studied previously, and there seemed every likelihood that the previously measured public opinion might have undergone some dramatic changes.

In order to study those issues and to measure the changes, Louis Harris and Associates interviewed 1,252 randomly selected adults across the United States by telephone from October 15 through October 26, 1982.

These consumers were questioned about the following:

— Worry and concern about consumer problems.

— Perceived changes in the marketplace over the past decade.

— Perceptions of how good or bad a job major figures, agencies, and organizations are doing in consumer protection.

— Perceptions of the organized consumer movement, including its accomplishments and its leadership.

— Views about government regulation, both as a general principle and in specific instances of consumer protection.

— The costs of consumer protection and whether those costs are worthwhile.

— Sources of information used by consumers in shopping around for the best buy.

— Credit as a consumer issue.

— Personal involvement in and support for the consumer movement.

— Willingness to pay extra for consumer advocacy.

Louis Harris and Associates is responsible for final determination of the questions as well as for analysis and interpretation of the data in *Consumerism in the Eighties*. For their helpful suggestions at many points, Louis Harris and Associates wants to thank ARCO's Consumer Affairs and Consumer Research departments.

Overview

Americans are becoming increasingly concerned about consumer issues. At the same time, they feel that leaders both in and out of government are not doing a very good job of protecting their interests. The Reagan Administration and the Congress, for example, are both rated poorly by the public. While most people give high marks to the consumer movement and its past accomplishments, consumers have become more critical of movement leaders since 1976. In fact, 45% now consider consumer leaders to be "out of touch with the public."

Among the concerns causing greater worry today than in 1976 are products that break or go wrong too soon and the poor quality of service and repairs. Consumers also think business offers products of high price and poor quality, thus giving declining value in the marketplace. On the positive side, most Americans believe that companies have improved product safety, as well as labeling and information.

Although public support for government regulation has declined, consumers think government should do more to control false advertising, dangerous products, misleading labels and inadequate warranties. The public realizes that consumer protection raises the price of goods and services, but it believes that such efforts are worth the cost.

Consumerism is a relatively new issue that cuts across traditional U.S. political and social coalitions. If these changing alignments extend to other issues, they may foreshadow the direction of American politics and public affairs for the rest of this century.

Selected Highlights

This section summarizes selected highlights of the research.

I. Consumer Concern Is Strong and Growing

The public is even more concerned today about a number of consumer problems than it was in 1976.

For example, problems such as too many products breaking or going wrong too soon and the poor quality of after-sales service and repairs are of more concern to consumers now than they were in 1976. Only worry about the high price of many products has declined and, even so, it remains the topmost-cited problem.

Consumers think there has been a decline in a number of aspects of the marketplace during the past decade.

They think that consumers get a worse deal in the marketplace and receive less value for their money as compared to a decade ago. They also think that the quality of most products and services — one of their biggest concerns — has declined.

Consumers also think there has been an improvement in a few areas of the marketplace during the past decade.

They think that the safety of most products has improved. They believe that labeling and information about products have improved, and the number who believe this has grown.

II. The Consumer Movement Is Rated Positively, but Criticism of Its Leadership Has Grown

The accomplishments of the people in the consumer movement are rated highly.

Over 80% say that people active in the consumer movement have done some good or a great deal of good. And two-thirds say the movement has grown stronger in the past five years.

Criticism of consumer leaders has grown.

The criticism registering the biggest absolute gain since 1976 is the proposition that consumer leaders are "out of touch" with consumers. Forty-five percent of consumers believe this now, twice the number who believed it in 1976. More consumers today also believe that consumer leaders fail to consider the cost of what they are asking for. Other criticisms of consumer leaders have also grown, so that one-quarter to one-third of the public subscribe to them. Criticism of consumer leaders today comes not only from the leaders' traditional opponents but also from those individuals who think the leaders are not doing enough to protect the consumer. However, the overall net balance of opinion remains favorable to consumer leaders.

Ralph Nader's rating has dropped, and he has become a more controversial and polarizing figure today than he was in 1976.

8 In 1976, Nader's positive ratings outnumbered his negative ratings by 2:1. Today, 39% of consumers rate him positively, while 34% rate him negatively. The proportion who say they don't know enough about him to judge has also grown.

A plurality of people think that consumer protection has raised prices, but a majority also believe that the costs of consumer protection are worth it.

Sixty-one percent perceive that government regulation raises prices; 45% think that demands by the consumer movement have also resulted in higher prices. Sixty-one percent say that extra costs for quality and safety due to government regulation are worth it; 54% say that extra costs for quality and safety due to pressure from the consumer movement are worth it.

Many consumers are willing to pay extra for advocacy, but tend to reject proposals forcing companies to solicit advocacy funds from customers.

Fifty-five percent are willing to pay extra when they pay their electricity bill if the money goes to an independent consumer group to defend the interests of electricity customers. Forty-five percent are willing to pay extra for advocacy for car buyers at the time they buy a new car. But only 37% think it is a good idea to require companies to make such opportunities available and 58% think it is a bad idea.

Public participation in the organized consumer movement is modest, but the potential for involvement is high.

Only 6% of the public say they have personally taken an active part in a consumer group while 14% say they have contributed money to such a group. But two-thirds say they would certainly or probably support a consumer pressure group in their area under certain circumstances. This potential support is not confined to certain social groups but is widespread.

III. Many Government Leaders and Agencies Are Seen as Not Doing a Good Job in Protecting the Consumer

Two-thirds of the public think the Reagan Administration is not doing a good job in protecting the interests of the consumer.

However, there is not a widespread belief that the Administration is trying to roll back or dismantle consumer protection. Instead, there is a widespread perception that the Reagan Administration is simply not doing much that is new in this area. Twenty-six percent say they think the Administration has tried to weaken consumer protection, a figure that is about equal to the 21% who think the Administration has tried to strengthen consumer protection. The plurality, 44%, believe the Reagan Administration has not made any changes in the consumer protection area.

Congress is rated even lower than the Reagan Administration.

Seventy-one percent of the public say Congress is not doing a good job in protecting the interests of consumers. Congress received the worst rating of the 11 agencies and groups evaluated.

The Consumer Product Safety Commission is the only arm of government that receives a clearly positive rating on protecting the consumer.

The Environmental Protection Agency draws about as many negative ratings as positive ones; its negative ratings have increased since 1976. The Federal Trade Commission, as well as both federal and state governments as a whole, receive quite negative ratings.

Consumers Union of the United States, Inc., which publishes *Consumer Reports* magazine, tops the list of eleven agencies and organizations rated on the job they are doing to protect the consumer.

Articles in independent consumer magazines like *Consumer Reports* also top the list of sources of information considered by consumers to be "very reliable."

IV. Support for Government Regulation in General Has Declined, but Not in the Area of Consumer Protection

Enthusiasm has waned for government regulation of business as a general principle of public policy.

In 1976, about as many consumers wanted more regulation as wanted less. Today, antiregulation opinion outnumbers opinion favoring more regulation by a ratio of 2:1. However, this indicator of opinion at a general or abstract level does not translate into public disfavor with all concrete forms of regulation. Quite the contrary, consumers strongly favor many specific types of regulation. Even those who oppose regulation in general often favor many specific types of regulation.

Consumers overwhelmingly endorse regulation for safety and protection; they are less keen on economic regulation of the marketplace.

Instances of protective intervention by the government typically receive public endorsement averaging about 80%. Instances of economic intervention by the government receive endorsement averaging about 40%.

Virtually no support is found for rolling back or dismantling consumer protection regulation.

Not all of the public's endorsement of protective regulation is desire for new and additional government intervention. A substantial proportion of it is simply an endorsement of the regulatory status quo. But hardly any support at all is found for rolling back or dismantling that status quo.

A solid majority wants the government to do more to protect consumers against companies that fail to live up to their advertising claims.

Other areas in which a majority or a plurality of the public feels the government is not doing enough include protection against inadequate guarantees and warranties (51%), against misleading packaging and labeling (48%), and against products that are dangerous (48%).

Deregulation of the airline industry is seen as good for the consumer. Deregulation of the oil industry is seen as bad for the consumer.

It seems that attitudes toward deregulation are influenced by attitudes in general toward the industry in question; they also seem to be affected by satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the price levels in each industry.

V. Credit Cards Are Seen as a Costly Convenience

Consumers think that credit cards are helpful, but they also believe credit cards add to the price of goods and services.

Many consumers seem to favor some kind of system that would make the credit user pay more of the cost and allow cash customers to pay less.

Consumers are not particularly worried about the availability of credit, but they are quite concerned about the high interest rate charged on credit.

They find it difficult to shop around for the best buy on credit, but do not perceive big differences in value for their money in the credit market.

VI. Consumerism in the Health Care Field

Consumers find it difficult to shop around for doctors.

They also perceive big differences in value for their money when shopping around for doctors. This may be due to the low amount of market competition that specialists say exists in the health care field. These findings may become a key baseline for repeated measurement in future polls if government and business leaders succeed in their plans to introduce more competition into the health care field.

VII. Consumerism: Breaking the Traditional Mold

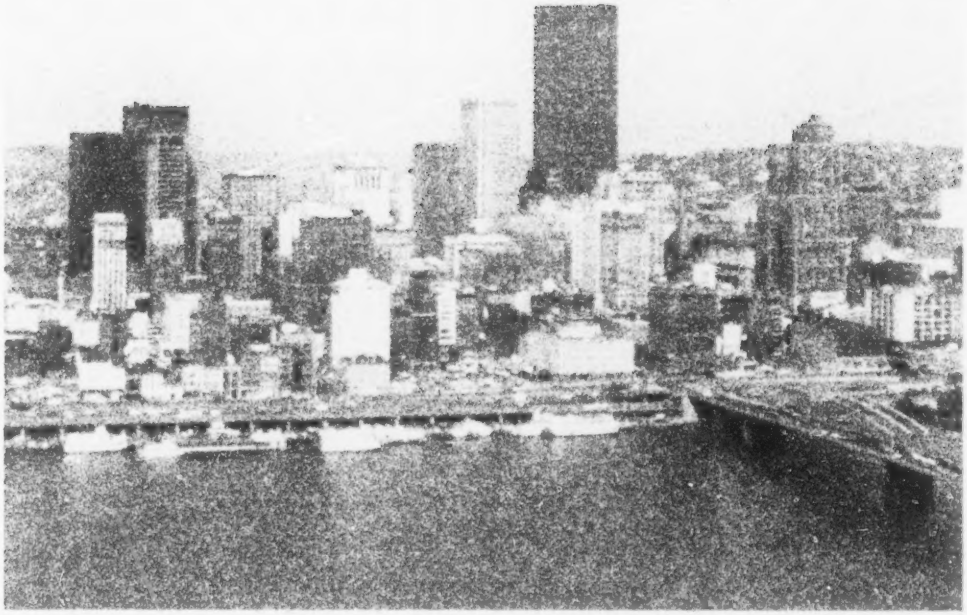
Consumerism is a new kind of social and political issue that does not closely follow traditional battlelines in American society.

Upper income and higher education groups are often more proconsumerist than people with lower incomes and less education. Women are often more proconsumerist than men. And political independents and ideological middle-of-the-roaders are sometimes more proconsumerist than *either* Democrats and Republicans *or* liberals and conservatives. These patterns represent a dramatic change from coalitions dating from New Deal days.

To some extent, consumerism does draw from those older coalitions. Thus, groups with the most consistently proconsumerist tendencies also include the young, individuals living in or near cities, Blacks, self-described liberals, and Democrats. Groups with the least consistently proconsumerist tendencies include town and rural dwellers, the older generation, whites, self-described conservatives, and Republicans. Nevertheless, the newer group differences overlay these traditional patterns and restructure the resulting coalitions.

These findings suggest that consumerism cuts across traditional social and political battlelines and produces new or modified kinds of coalitions. If these patterns transfer to other issues, then *Consumerism in the Eighties* may provide a road map to American politics and public affairs in the years to come □

The Changing Environment Facing the Consumer



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Aspects of the Marketplace that Worry Consumers

High prices, high interest rates, and the poor quality of many products head the list of consumer worries. Sixty-seven percent of consumers say they have worried "a great deal" about the high prices of many products. The high rate of interest charged on credit is next, cited by 59% of consumers as having caused them a great deal of worry. And 51% say they have worried a great deal over the poor quality of many products.

Three other aspects of the current marketplace have been of great concern to at least 40% of consumers. Forty-six percent have worried a great deal about too many products breaking or going wrong soon after they are brought home. Forty-nine percent cite the poor quality of after-sales service and repairs. Too many products that are dangerous are cited by 40% of consumers.

Four additional problems of the marketplace provoke great concern from at least one-third of consumers. The failure of many companies to live up to claims made in their advertising is mentioned by 39% of the public. Misleading packaging or labeling is also of great concern to 39% of those interviewed. And 39% also say they worry a great deal over the failure of companies to handle complaints properly. Thirty-six percent cite inadequate guarantees or warranties as a major concern.

Difficulty in obtaining as much credit as they need is cited by 18% of consumers. About three times that number mention the high rate of interest charged on credit.

Table 1-1 presents these results from the 1982 survey and shows them in comparison with the degree of concern found in the 1976 survey.

Shifting Concerns over Time

The public is more concerned today about a number of consumer problems than it was in 1976. Of the nine aspects of the marketplace investigated in both surveys, concern is clearly down in only one case; concern rose in five cases; it has remained more or less stable in three other cases.

The October 1982 survey showed a 10 percentage-point drop in concern about high prices from the 1976 level — from 77% to 67%. Even so, high prices continue to cause great worry to two-thirds of consumers, and they top the list of consumer worries in 1982 just as they did in 1976.

In five instances concern has risen between the two survey years. A rise of 10 percentage points or more occurred for the following concerns: too many products that are dangerous (+14 points); too many products breaking or going wrong soon after you bring them home (+11 points); the poor quality of after-sales service and repairs (+11 points); and failure of companies to handle complaints properly (+10 points). Concern about inadequate guarantees and warranties rose slightly less (+6 points).

Concern over dangerous products conceivably could have been influenced by the highly publicized Tylenol capsule contamination incident that occurred in the autumn of 1982. However, this cannot account fully for the increase in this concern. The Harris *Perspective* measured concern about dangerous products in 1978 and found that concern had already risen 10 percentage points by that year.

Worry about three concerns has remained approximately steady between 1976 and 1982. The poor quality of many products is of great concern to 51% of the public in the 1982 survey; in 1976 it was cited by 48%. In each survey it was among the concerns that worried consumers the most. Concern about misleading packaging or labeling (+5 points) was near the bottom of the list of worries each year, but it was of great concern to over one-third of consumers in each survey. The failure of many companies to live up to their advertising claims (−5 points), while not a top worry, was also a matter of great concern to about 4 out of 10 consumers each year.

Table 1-1
Problems That Worry Consumers "A Great Deal": 1982 and 1976

Q.7: Now I am going to read you a list of things that are of concern to some **consumers.** I want you to think about your own experience as a consumer. Please tell me, for each one, how much it has worried you personally — a great deal, somewhat, a little bit, or not at all.

	Worried "A Great Deal" Total	
	1982 October	1976 November
Base	1,252	1,510
	%	%
The high prices of many products	67	77
The high rate of interest charged on credit	59	X
The poor quality of many products	51	48
The poor quality of after-sales service and repairs	49	38
Too many products breaking or going wrong soon after you bring them home	46	35
Too many products that are dangerous	40	26
The failure of many companies to live up to claims made in their advertising	39	44
Misleading packaging or labeling	39	34
Failure of companies to handle complaints properly	39	29
Inadequate guarantees or warranties	36	30
Difficulty in obtaining as much credit as you need	18	X

X = Not asked.

Who Tends to Be Worried Most?

Overall, 41% of the total sample cite a great deal of worry over a majority (i.e., six or more) of the eleven concerns. Table 1-2 shows the percentage of various subgroups who say they personally have worried "a great deal" over a majority of the eleven consumer problems.

Among the most concerned are women, individuals under the age of 50, Blacks and Hispanics, inhabitants of urban areas and the suburban fringes, liberals, and Democrats. Showing less concern are men, individuals aged 50 or over, whites, individuals earning over $50,000, inhabitants of towns and rural areas, middle-of-the-roaders and conservatives, and Republicans. The best educated also show somewhat less concern than others.

It should be emphasized that no subgroup shown in Table 1-2 is without a significant number of persons who have worried about consumer affairs. Concern reaches the level of one-third or more in 26 of the 29 subgroups . Even the most affluent subgroup, that with individuals with a household income of $50,000 or more, contains 32% who admit to great worry about a majority of the eleven consumer problems.

Observation:

The public is more concerned today about a number of consumer problems than it was in 1976. With the exception of inflation (where consumers witnessed some objective improvement in the months prior to the 1982 survey), virtually all of the consumer problems we investigated provoked concern that was as high as or higher in 1982 than it was in 1976. Thus, the concerns that initially fueled the consumer movement still exist.

When one examines the distribution of worry within various subgroups, one tends to find a familiar pattern. The most affluent, the conservative, and those removed from urban life tend to be less worried about consumer problems. Minority groups, liberals, and those in or near big cities tend to be more concerned. This pattern reflects some familiar coalitions in battles over consumer legislation.

Perceived Progress vs. Decline in the Marketplace

Consumers were asked to assess changes in the marketplace over the past ten years, focusing on seven specific areas.

There are three areas of perceived improvement. Eighty percent see improvement over the last ten years in labeling and information about products. Seventy-nine percent see improvement in consumers' shopping skills. Sixty-two percent see improvement in the safety of most products over the last ten years. In all three of these areas, improvement had also been cited in the 1976 survey over the then-previous ten-year period. In the case of labeling and product information, that optimism has clearly increased between 1976 and 1982 (+10 percentage points). In 1976, 70% saw improvement in labeling and information; in 1982 80% see such improvement. Table 1-3 shows these results.

There are three areas of perceived decline. Fifty-four percent of the public think consumers get a worse deal in the marketplace today than they did ten years ago. Fifty-nine percent say that the quality of most products and services has grown worse. These levels of pessimism are about the same as those measured in the 1976 survey relative to the then-previous ten years. Seventy-six percent believe that the value you get for your money on most goods and services has declined.

Opinion is more narrowly divided on the matter of most companies' handling of complaints. Forty-five percent of consumers see an improvement, while 39% see a decline. Opinion was also closely divided when this question was asked in 1976, but in 1982 the balance of opinion seems to have shifted slightly toward perceived improvement in the area of complaint handling.

When one compares Table 1-3 with Table 1-1, a general pattern emerges. The areas in which consumers see deterioration in the marketplace tend also to be areas that concern them most. Americans are particularly disturbed by goods they think are of high price, of poor quality, and thus of declining value.

Table 1-2
Who Tends to Be Most Worried About Consumer Problems

Q.7: Now I am going to read you a list of things that are of concern to some **consumers.** I want you to think about your own experience as a consumer. Please tell me, for each one, how much it has worried you personally — a great deal, somewhat, a little bit, or not at all.

	1982 October		
	Base		Worried "A Great Deal" About Six or More of the Eleven Consumer Concerns
Total	1,252	%	41
Sex			
Female	646	%	45
Male	606	%	38
Age			
18-29 Years	348	%	45
30-49 Years	482	%	44
50-64 Years	239	%	39
65 and over	178	%	31
Race			
Black	111	%	63
Hispanic	67	%	54
White	1,074	%	38
Household income			
$7,500 or less	146	%	45
$7,501-$15,000	248	%	42
$15,001-$25,000	348	%	40
$25,001-$35,000	207	%	42
$35,001-$50,000	131	%	43
$50,001 and over	81	%	32
Education			
8th Grade	75	%	36
High school	602	%	46
Some college	281	%	40
College graduate	290	%	33
Party identification			
Democrat	501	%	47
Independent	368	%	41
Republican	303	%	35
Political philosophy			
Liberal	251	%	50
Middle-of-the-road	517	%	40
Conservative	431	%	40
Place of residence			
City	364	%	47
Suburb	345	%	45
Town	192	%	32
Rural	351	%	37

Note: The eleven areas are shown in Table 1-1.

Table 1-3
Perceived Change in the Consumer Environment in the Past Ten Years: 1982 and 1976

Q.1: I'd like to have your views on how some things have changed in the last ten years. **Compared to ten years ago,** would you say that *(read each item)* has (have) improved/gotten better or (grown) worse?

	Total	
	1982 October	1976 November
Base	1,252	1,510
	%	%
Labeling and information about products		
Have improved	80	70
Have grown worse	13	15
No change (volunteered)	4	10
Not sure	3	5
Consumers' shopping skills		
Have gotten better	79	72
Have gotten worse	15	13
No change (volunteered)	3	9
Not sure	3	6
The safety of most products		
Has improved	62	60
Has grown worse	27	26
No change (volunteered)	6	11
Not sure	5	4
Most companies' handling of complaints from consumers		
Has gotten better	45	35
Has gotten worse	39	37
No change (volunteered)	6	16
Not sure	10	13
The deal that consumers get in the marketplace		
Is better	31	27
Is worse	54	50
No change (volunteered)	6	16
Not sure	9	7
The quality of most products and services		
Has improved	31	27
Has grown worse	59	61
No change (volunteered)	7	8
Not sure	3	3
The value you get for your money on most goods and services		
Has gotten better	17	X
Has gotten worse	76	X
No change (volunteered)	4	X
Not sure	3	X

X = not asked.

Table 1-4
Who Tends to See Progress vs. Decline Over the Last Ten Years

Q.1: I'd like to have your views on how some things have changed in the last ten years. **Compared to ten years ago**, would you say that *(read each item)* has (have) improved/gotten better or (grown) worse?

			1982 October	
	Base		See Progress in at Least Five of Seven Consumer Areas	See a Decline in at Least Five of Seven Consumer Areas
Total	**1,252**	%	**27**	**16**
Sex				
Female	646	%	24	18
Male	606	%	31	15
Age				
18-29 Years	348	%	29	15
30-49 Years	482	%	32	12
50-64 Years	239	%	25	21
65 and over	178	%	18	24
Race				
Black	111	%	17	31
Hispanic	67	%	26	31
White	1,074	%	29	14
Household income				
$7,500 or less	146	%	14	33
$7,501-$15,000	248	%	21	22
$15,001-$25,000	348	%	32	13
$25,001-$35,000	207	%	25	11
$35,001-$50,000	131	%	39	10
$50,001 and over	81	%	40	11
Education				
8th Grade	75	%	13	32
High school	602	%	24	20
Some college	281	%	33	12
College graduate	290	%	33	10
Party identification				
Democrat	501	%	25	20
Independent	368	%	27	14
Republican	303	%	33	12
Political philosophy				
Liberal	251	%	21	22
Middle-of-the-road	517	%	29	15
Conservative	431	%	29	16
Place of residence				
City	364	%	28	19
Suburb	345	%	26	13
Town	192	%	28	15
Rural	351	%	27	18

Note: The seven consumer areas are shown in Table 1-3.
Not shown are those seeing a more even combination of progress and decline.

Who Sees Progress vs. Decline in the Marketplace?

Overall, 27% of the total sample think there has been mainly progress while 16% of the total sample think there has been mainly decline. Table 1-4 indicates who tends to see progress and who tends to perceive decline in at least five of the seven areas.

Those groups most likely to perceive progress include men, individuals under the age of 50, whites, individuals earning over $35,000, persons with at least some college education, Republicans, middle-of-the-roaders, and conservatives.

Those groups most likely to perceive deterioration include women, persons aged 50 and over, Blacks, individuals with annual incomes of $15,000 or less, individuals with the least education, Democrats, and liberals.

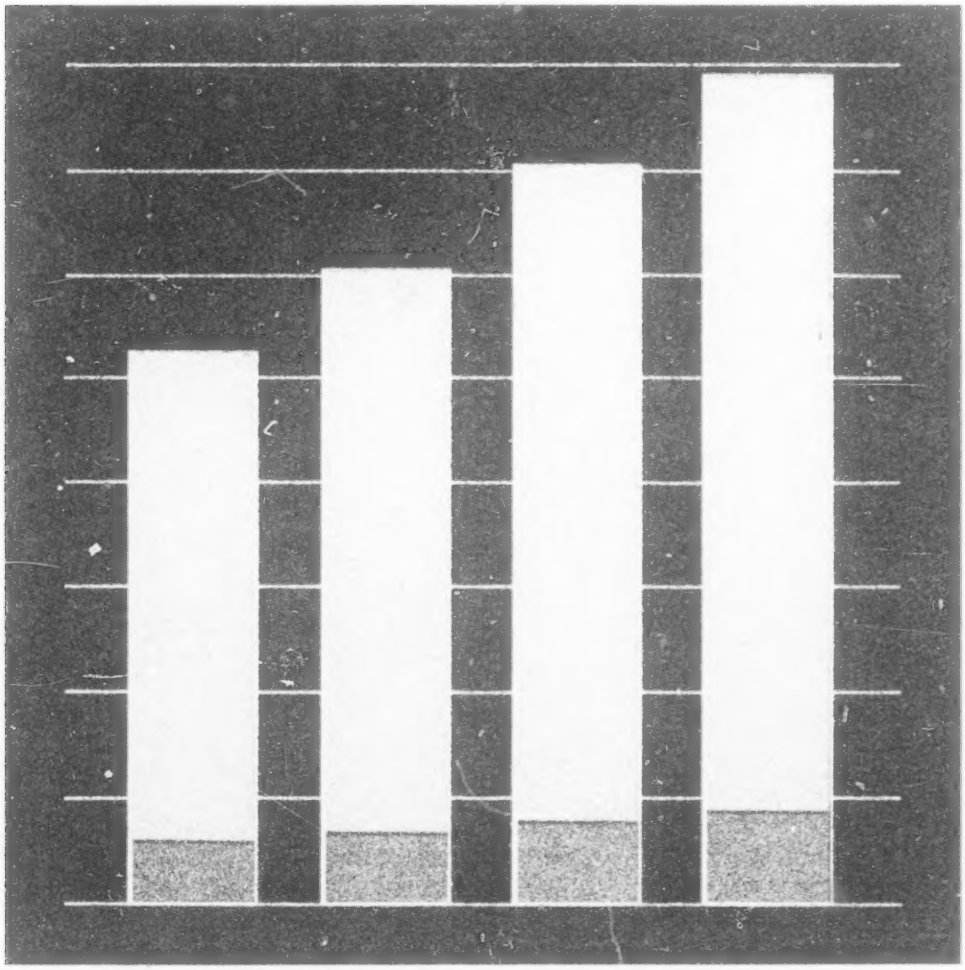
Observation:

Some progress by business can be reported. Significantly more consumers today than in 1976 see improvement in labeling and product information and in business' handling of complaints.

The demographic pattern in perceived change over ten years is similar to the demographic pattern reported earlier of who worries about consumer problems. In each case, there seems to be visible a coalition consisting of the relatively established and the secure, who seem more satisfied with the current marketplace, arrayed against a coalition consisting of the relatively disadvantaged and the vulnerable, who seem more dissatisfied with the current marketplace.

Only the age patterns seem inconsistent. The young tend to be more worried but at the same time more likely to see progress. Their relative optimism might be due to the shorter time period available to them to make such time comparisons; in this case they might be expected to grow less sanguine as they grow older and gain experience. But their optimism may also be due to a generational effect. They experienced the growth and early success of the consumer movement as they were growing up, and they may be more optimistic about its accomplishments throughout their lives.

Rating the Government, Organizations, and Agencies on Consumer Protection



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Ratings of Eleven Groups: How Good a Job Are They Doing in Protecting the Interests of Consumers?

Consumers rate three agencies or groups in a clearly positive way. They are more closely divided on two others. They rate six agencies or groups in a clearly negative way. Table 2-1 presents the results.

Consumers Union of the United States, Inc., which publishes *Consumer Reports* magazine, tops the list. Fifty-six percent of the public think that Consumers Union does an excellent or good job in protecting the interests of consumers; only 20% think Consumers Union is doing a fair or poor job, i.e., not a good job. The Better Business Bureau ranked next (54% vs. 34%). The third agency that is rated positively is the Consumer Product Safety Commission (44% vs. 26%).

Two additional actors in consumer protection receive ratings that are technically positive, but much more closely divided. Ralph Nader is cited by 39% as doing an excellent or good job; 34% say only fair or poor. The Environmental Protection Agency receives excellent or good ratings from 44% of consumers but 43% give the EPA only fair or poor marks.

Six agencies or groups received ratings that are, on balance, negative. The Federal Trade Commission is rated excellent or good by only 26% of consumers, while 39% give the FTC a fair or poor rating. The federal government as a whole garners 33% excellent or good ratings, but 56% fair or poor marks. Their own state government is rated positively by 29% of consumers and negatively by 60%. This figure, however, is from the entire national sample, and it may hide some interesting state-to-state variations in performance ratings. The last three groups receive ratings that are negative by a ratio of 2:1 or worse. Private industry is rated excellent or good in the consumer protection area by only 26% of consumers, while 57% say it is not doing a good job. The Reagan Administration receives 28% excellent or good ratings, while 65% say it is not doing a good job. Finally, the U.S. Congress is rated by 19% as excellent or good, and by 71% as not doing a good job.

It should be noted that in a 1978 Harris *Perspective*, "Congress" and "the White House" also received low ratings on consumer protection during the Carter Administration. Also, Congress as a whole is usually evaluated more negatively in polls than are individual Congressmen.

Change in Ratings of Ralph Nader Since 1976

Six of the eleven groups were also rated in the 1976 survey, so that the 1982 results reveal any changes over time. In most cases the ratings have remained stable. The only major change involves Ralph Nader. More modest shifts involve the Environmental Protection Agency and the Consumer Product Safety Commission.

In the cases of the EPA and the CPSC, their positive ratings are about the same as in 1976, but their negative ratings are up slightly. This may represent a slight hardening of opinion about these two agencies.

In the case of Ralph Nader, however, the shift since 1976 has been dramatic. His combined excellent and good ratings are down by 15 percentage points, while his combined fair and poor ratings are up by 9 percentage points. This yields a favorability ratio that has slipped from 54%:25% favorable over unfavorable in 1976 to a balance of opinion today that is much more evenly divided (39%:34% favorable over unfavorable). Ralph Nader seems to be a much more controversial and polarizing figure today than he was in 1976.

Between 1976 and 1982, Ralph Nader's standing dropped the most among suburbanites (−26 percentage points), among college-educated people (−22 percentage points), and among young adults aged 18-29 years (−21 percentage points). Suburbanites and the college-educated were among the most pro-Nader groups in 1976, with more than 60% of each giving Nader positive marks that year. Relatively speaking, they remain among the most pro-Nader groups in 1982, albeit at an overall reduced level of support. With the passage of time, these two particularly pro-Nader groups have come to appear a bit less distinctive and a little more like everyone else in their attitudes toward Ralph Nader. Table 2-2 presents these results.

Table 2-1
Ratings of Those Involved in Consumer Protection: 1982 and 1976

Q.16: I am going to read you the names of different groups and people. Please tell me, for each one, how good or bad a job they have done in protecting the interests of consumers — whether they have done an excellent job, a pretty good job, only a fair job, or a poor job — or do you know nothing about them?

	Total			
	1982 October		1976 November	
Base	1,252		1,510	
	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative
	%	%	%	%
Three that are rated positively (see note):				
Consumers Union, which publishes *Consumer Reports* magazine	56	20	X	X
The Better Business Bureau	54	34	53	32
The Consumer Product Safety Commission	44	26	43	20
Two on which opinion is divided:				
Ralph Nader	39	34	54	25
The Environmental Protection Agency	44	43	43	35
Six that are rated negatively (see note):				
The Federal Trade Commission	26	39	X	X
The Federal Government	33	56	32	60
Your state government	29	60	28	59
Private industry	26	57	X	X
The Reagan Administration	28	65	X	X
The U.S. Congress	19	71	X	X

X = not asked.
Note: "Positive" = "excellent" plus "good."
"Negative" = "fair" plus "poor."

It should be emphasized that not all of the drop-off in positive evaluation has switched over to negative evaluation. A substantial proportion of it has gone to the "not sure" and "know nothing about him" categories, which rose from a total of 21% to a total of 27% between 1976 and 1982. This phenomenon is particularly striking in the case of young people aged 18-29 years. In 1976, individuals under the age of 30 rated Nader 51% positive, 24% negative, and 25% not sure or know nothing about him. In 1982, the new younger generation under the age of 30 rates Nader 30% positive, 30% negative, and 40% not sure or know nothing about him. In 1976, then, most young adults felt they knew enough about Nader to give him a rating, and that rating was positive over negative by 2:1. In 1982, a plurality of the new generation of young people feel they know too little about Nader to judge, and those who can judge divide evenly over him.

Support for Ralph Nader has held up somewhat better among other groups. Easterners, for instance, were highly pro-Nader in 1976, sustained a below-average drop, and remain relatively pro-Nader in 1982, compared to residents of other regions. City dwellers dropped off less than any other subgroup examined in their approval of Nader. In 1976, city dwellers were 20 percentage points less positive about Nader than were suburbanites; in 1982, the percentage of city dwellers equals that of suburbanites in approval of Nader. The middle age group also sustained a less-than-average drop in approval of Nader. Persons aged 30-49 were the most pro-Nader of any age group in 1976, and those who are aged 30-49 in 1982 are also the most pro-Nader of all the age groups. Women, whose opinion of Nader was indistinguishable from that of men in 1976, experienced a smaller drop-off, and women are now more pro-Nader than are men.

Ralph Nader's standing with the public is connected to the public's overall evaluation of the consumer movement. In the 1982 survey, Nader is rated 71% positive by those who think that people active in the consumer movement have done a "great deal of good," 39% positive by those who say that consumer activists have done "some good," and only 15% positive by those who think that consumer activists have done "harm." Because Nader has for so long been one of the most prominent consumer advocates, it is natural that his public standing would be linked with public evaluation of the entire movement. The public's view of the consumer movement and its overall leadership is discussed in Chapter 3.

Nader's standing is also connected to the public's views on the costs of consumerism. Those who think the consumer movement and government regulation to protect consumers have raised the price of products and services are less positive about Ralph Nader than are those who think that these types of consumer protection have not raised prices. And those who doubt that consumer protection is worth its cost are less positive about Nader than are those who believe that consumer protection is worth its cost. Public views about the costs of consumer protection are discussed in Chapter 5.

Finally, Nader's standing is also connected to the public's view of regulation as a general principle of public policy. Those who prefer more government regulation of business are relatively positive about Nader. Those who prefer less regulation are more negative about Nader. As Chapter 4 shows, the size of the antiregulation group grew and the size of the proregulation group shrank between 1976 and 1982.

Observation:

The decline in Ralph Nader's popularity and the rise in the public's uncertainty about Nader suggest that leaders in the consumer movement have a continuing need for dramatic issues or notable successes in order to retain high visibility and positive ratings among the rank-and-file public. For instance, persons who were in their 20s and 30s at the height of the consumer movement (who now show up in the 30-49 age group in our poll) seem to know Nader well and they rate him the highest of any age group. The new under-30 age group, who entered their 20s during the past decade, seem to know Nader much less well and they are evenly divided in their ratings of him. This suggests that there is a need for constant recruiting of the public by the consumer movement, perhaps by emphasizing new issues that will mobilize new groups of people.

Table 2-2
Ratings of Ralph Nader: 1982 and 1976

Q.16e: I am going to read you the names of different groups and people. Please tell me for each one, how good or bad a job they have done in protecting the interests of consumers — whether they have done an excellent job, a pretty good job, only a fair job, or a poor job — or do you know nothing about them?

	1982			1976			Shift
	Base		Positive Rating (Excellent + Pretty Good)	Base		Positive Rating (Excellent + Pretty Good)	From 1976 to 1982
Total	**1,252**	%	**39**	**1,510**	%	**54**	**−15**
Region							
East	328	%	50	448	%	62	−12
Midwest	334	%	39	449	%	56	−17
West	230	%	39	264	%	58	−19
South	360	%	30	349	%	40	−10
Place of residence							
City	364	%	41	488	%	47	− 6
Suburb	345	%	41	419	%	67	−26
Town	192	%	38	236	%	52	−14
Rural	351	%	36	367	%	51	−15
Age							
18-29 Years	348	%	30	410	%	51	−21
30-49 Years	482	%	46	498	%	58	−12
50 and over	417	%	40	595	%	54	−14
Education							
8th Grade	75	%	26	188	%	41	−15
High school	602	%	36	742	%	50	−14
Some college or more	571	%	43	574	%	65	−22
Sex							
Female	646	%	42	752	%	54	−12
Male	606	%	36	758	%	55	−19
Household income							
(1982)							
$7,500 or less	146	%	31	X	%	X	X
$7,501-$15,000	248	%	36	X	%	X	X
$15,001-$25,000	348	%	39	X	%	X	X
$25,001 and over	419	%	44	X	%	X	X
(1976)							
Under $5,000	X	%	X	202	%	40	X
$5,000-$9,999	X	%	X	372	%	51	X
$10,000-$14,999	X	%	X	351	%	56	X
$15,000 and over	X	%	X	529	%	62	X

Note: No shift is shown for household income because the categories in 1982 and 1976 are not strictly comparable. The four household income categories, however, are similar in size for each year.

Table 2-3
How Various Groups Perceive the Reagan Administration's Actions Concerning Consumer Protection

Q.19: From what you've read or heard, has Ronald Reagan's Administration tried to **strengthen** consumer protection, or has it tried to **weaken** consumer protection, or has the Reagan Administration not made any changes in the consumer protection area?

			1982 October			
	Base		Has Tried to Strengthen	Has Not Made Any Changes	Has Tried to Weaken	Not Sure
Total	**1,252**	%	**21**	**44**	**26**	**9**
Region						
East	328	%	20	42	29	9
Midwest	334	%	21	44	26	9
West	230	%	14	45	30	11
South	360	%	26	43	21	10
Age						
18-29 Years	348	%	19	48	29	5
30-49 Years	482	%	22	46	24	8
50-64 Years	239	%	22	38	27	13
65 and over	178	%	20	39	23	18
Race						
Black	111	%	12	42	43	3
Hispanic	67	%	20	47	29	4
White	1,074	%	22	44	24	11
Education						
8th Grade	75	%	23	38	26	13
High school	602	%	21	46	22	11
Some college	281	%	24	41	26	9
College graduate	290	%	17	43	34	6
Party identification						
Democrat	501	%	14	42	34	10
Independent	368	%	20	48	25	7
Republican	303	%	33	43	15	9
Political philosophy						
Liberal	251	%	16	37	40	7
Middle-of-the-road	517	%	20	44	26	10
Conservative	431	%	25	48	19	8
Those most worried about consumer concerns	511	%	20	50	24	6
Perceived change in the consumer environment in the past ten years						
Mainly progress	349	%	27	44	21	8
Mainly decline	197	%	18	42	32	8
Those who have been active in or have contributed money to a consumer group	200	%	16	41	37	6

24 Perceptions of the Reagan Administration

Most consumers do not see the Reagan Administration as a strong advocate of consumer protection. Indeed, two-thirds say the Administration is not doing a good job in this area. Among the eleven agencies and groups rated in Table 2-1, the Reagan Administration ranked next to last. But neither do they see its first two years in office as having posed a major threat to, or as having undertaken a major dismantling of, the accomplishments of past administrations in the consumer protection area. Table 2-3 presents the findings.

Overall, 21% of consumers perceive that the Reagan Administration has tried to strengthen consumer protection. This is roughly equal to the percentage (26%) who feel the Reagan Administration has tried to weaken consumer protection. The plurality (44%) see no changes in the consumer protection area. Most consumers, then, apparently do not feel that their interests are threatened or at risk after the first two years of the Reagan Administration.

Those who are most likely to see a weakening of consumer protection include college graduates, Blacks, liberals, Democrats, and those who have been active in or who have contributed to a consumer group. However, even within these groups who are least impressed with the Reagan Administration's record on consumerism, the feeling that the Administration has tried to weaken consumer protection never rises above 45%. In 23 out of the 25 subgroups that were examined, the plurality answer was that the Administration has "not made any changes in the consumer protection area."

Observation:

These findings present public perceptions of the Reagan Administration. Such perceptions often are not well backed by information, and can be altered by some dramatic occurrence that catches the public's attention and gives it additional information.

Rating the
Consumer Movement
and its Leadership

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Perceived Overall Impact and Accomplishments of the Consumer Movement

Overall, the public's opinion of the consumer movement and its leadership continues to be high. Eighty-three percent say that people active in the consumer movement have done "a great deal of good" or "some good." Only 13% say that activists in the movement have done "some harm" or a "great deal of harm." As shown in Table 3-1, this represents an assessment that is virtually unchanged from 1976, when 83% also reached a judgment of "good" and a mere 4% said "harm."

It is sometimes tempting to invest great significance in small movements that may prove to be mere jiggles or blips. For instance, 4% fewer today say "a great deal" of good while 4% more now say only "some" good. And 9% more today are willing to see some degree of "harm" from the movement and its leaders, while 9% fewer today reserve judgment by saying "not sure" or "no effect." This could represent some tempering of approval of the movement and its accomplishments that could grow in the future.

Nevertheless, the overall judgment of the public remains quite positive in 1982 just as it was in 1976. Of course, that judgment is not, and never was, as positive as it *might* be. At least four times as many people see "some" good as see "a great deal" of good in both the 1976 and 1982 surveys. Clearly, there is room for future growth in approval, just as there is room for future decline.

Who Rates the Movement's Accomplishments Most Highly?

How do various subgroups evaluate the impact of the movement and its leaders? A few mild patterns are evident. By region, for instance, positive judgment of the movement is strongest in the East and weakest in the South. By education, it is strongest among the better educated and weakest among less well educated people. But the overwhelming impression from Table 3-2 is that approval of the movement's accomplishments is very widely and evenly spread across demographic subgroups. Of the 21 demographic subgroups examined, only 1 (the least educated group) has more than 20% who see some degree of "harm" from the movement. Of the same 21 demographic groups, only 3 (Southerners, those aged 65 and

Table 3-1
Whether Consumer Activists Have Done Good or Harm: 1982 and 1976

Q.13: Overall, do you feel that people active in the consumer movement have done a great deal of good, some good, some harm, or a great deal of harm?

	Total	
	1982 October	1976 November
Base	1,252	1,510
	%	%
A great deal of good	12	16
Some good	71	67
Some harm	10	3
A great deal of harm	3	1
Had no effect (volunteered)	1	4
Not sure	3	9

Table 3-2
How Various Groups Evaluate the Impact of Consumer Activists

Q.13: Overall, do you feel that people active in the consumer movement have done a great deal of good, some good, some harm, or a great deal of harm?

			1982 October					
	Base		A Great Deal of Good	Some Good	Some Harm	A Great Deal of Harm	Had No Effect (Volunteered)	Not Sure
Total	**1,252**	%	**12**	**71**	**10**	**3**	**1**	**3**
Region								
East	328	%	16	71	8	2	1	2
Midwest	334	%	12	71	10	4	*	3
West	230	%	11	72	9	3	1	4
South	360	%	8	71	13	3	1	4
Age								
18-29 Years	348	%	10	75	10	3	—	2
30-49 Years	482	%	15	71	9	2	1	2
50-64 Years	239	%	10	72	12	2	*	3
65 and over	178	%	9	66	11	5	1	8
Race								
Black	111	%	15	65	11	6	1	2
Hispanic	67	%	10	72	14	1	—	3
White	1,074	%	11	72	10	3	1	3
Education								
8th Grade	75	%	3	63	17	6	1	10
High school	602	%	9	72	11	4	1	3
Some college	281	%	13	76	7	1	*	3
College graduate	290	%	18	69	9	2	—	2
Party identification								
Democrat	501	%	15	69	11	3	*	2
Independent	368	%	12	73	8	3	1	3
Republican	303	%	8	73	13	2	*	4
Political philosophy								
Liberal	251	%	16	70	8	3	—	3
Middle-of-the-road	517	%	10	73	10	3	1	3
Conservative	431	%	11	71	11	3	1	3
Those most worried about consumer concerns	511	%	14	69	10	4	*	2
Perceived change in the consumer environment in the past ten years								
Mainly progress	349	%	15	72	8	2	1	2
Mainly decline	197	%	8	67	13	8	1	3
Perceived adequacy of government regulation in protecting consumers								
It is about right	340	%	9	79	8	1	*	3
It has not done enough	532	%	12	71	10	4	*	3

*Less than 0.5%.

Note: Attitudes toward government regulation are discussed further in Chapter 4.

older, and the least educated group) fail to contain at least 80% who see some degree of "good" from the movement.

Even the groups least impressed with the accomplishments of the movement give a judgment of "good" over "harm" by a ratio of about 3:1 or better. And even people who see a deterioration in the marketplace over the past ten years see "good" rather than "harm" from the movement by a 3:1 ratio. The accomplishments of the consumer movement are clearly acknowledged by virtually every group throughout society.

Perceived Growth in the Consumer Movement

Likewise, there is a widespread perception throughout the public that the consumer movement is stronger today than it was five years ago. Overall, 66% of the public think the movement has grown stronger, 26% see it as having grown weaker, 2% see no change, and 6% aren't sure.

Table 3-3 shows how this perception of growth varies in different locales and by different subgroups. Growth in the movement is most strongly perceived in cities and their suburbs, among those under the age of 30, among college educated people, among political independents, and among ideological middle-of-the-roaders.

Among the 22 subgroups presented in the table, only one group (the least educated) fails to have at least 60% who see a stronger movement today. Even among the groups least likely to see growth in the movement, a perception of "stronger" outnumbers "weaker" by a ratio of around 2:1. The exception to this is the least educated group, again, in which the percentage ratio is 50:37 stronger to weaker.

The overall impression from Table 3-3 is that a strengthened consumer movement is widely perceived and acknowledged throughout all subgroups of society, even those subgroups who are least enthusiastic about the movement.

Image of Consumer Leaders

The public is less overwhelmingly positive about current consumer leaders than it is about the past accomplishments of the movement. Table 3-4 presents five pairs of statements that describe leaders and spokesmen of the consumer movement. In each pair, one statement is intended to be criticism, the other to be praise.

The dimension in which consumer leaders are most praised and least criticized is whether or not they are "troublemakers." Only 24% think that "troublemakers" is a fair description; 62% reject it. With regard to two other dimensions, praise also overwhelms criticism by ratios of about 2:1. Sixty-two percent think consumer leaders "genuinely want to help consumers"; only 30% think leaders are "mainly concerned about helping themselves." Fifty-eight percent say consumer leaders are "reasonable in their criticisms and demands"; only 31% think leaders are "unreasonable."

With regard to two other dimensions, however, the criticism equals or exceeds the praise. Forty-five percent feel that consumer leaders "reflect consumers' feelings"; an equal 45% say leaders are "out of touch with consumers." The criticism that has the most resonance with the public is that consumer leaders "do not consider the cost of what they are asking for." Forty-nine percent think this is an apt description; only 40% reject the criticism. (In order to ascertain whether or not this statement was indeed intended as a criticism, the 1976 survey went on to ask those who agreed with this criticism whether they thought consumer leaders *should* consider costs. Eighty-five percent in the 1976 survey said that leaders *should* consider the cost of what they are asking for.)

With regard to the five dimensions, then, on balance consumer leaders are praised in three cases, are criticized in one, and earn a split decision in another. In four of the five dimensions, the public's criticism rises to 30% or more, indicating substantial complaints about consumer leaders despite their positive overall image.

Shifts in the Image of Consumer Leaders Since 1976

The level of criticism has been rising over time. Table 3-4 shows the figures for the same five pairs of statements from the 1976 survey, revealing some dramatic changes since then.

Table 3-3
Perceived Growth of the Consumer Movement

Q.14: In the last five years, do you think that the consumer movement has grown stronger or weaker?

	1982 October					
	Base		Stronger	Weaker	No Change (Volunteered)	Not Sure
Total	**1,252**	%	**66**	**26**	**2**	**6**
Region						
East	328	%	70	21	4	4
Midwest	334	%	69	25	1	5
West	230	%	65	28	1	6
South	360	%	61	31	1	6
Place of residence						
City	364	%	69	24	3	4
Suburb	345	%	69	23	3	5
Town	192	%	64	25	2	8
Rural	351	%	60	32	1	7
Age						
18-29 Years	348	%	73	24	1	2
30-49 Years	482	%	67	26	2	5
50-64 Years	239	%	60	31	1	8
65 and over	178	%	60	25	5	10
Education						
8th Grade	75	%	50	37	1	12
High school	602	%	66	26	1	7
Some college	281	%	68	26	3	3
College graduate	290	%	69	24	4	3
Party identification						
Democrat	501	%	64	30	1	5
Independent	306	%	71	21	3	5
Republican	303	%	66	26	2	6
Political philosophy						
Liberal	251	%	60	33	2	5
Middle-of-the-road	517	%	72	21	2	4
Conservative	431	%	64	28	2	6

None of the five statements intended as praise receives higher agreement today than it did in 1976. Two of the statements clearly elicit less praise today, and three have remained more or less stable. All five of the statements intended as criticism provoke more agreement today than they did in 1976.

Agreement with the proposition that consumer leaders are troublemakers has almost doubled, going up 11 percentage points from 13% in 1976 to 24% in 1982. Agreement with the statement that consumer leaders are unreasonable in their criticisms and demands has more than doubled, increasing by 17 points from 14% to 31% since 1976. Agreement with the statement that consumer leaders are mainly concerned about themselves has nearly tripled, going up 19 points from 11% in 1976 to 30% in 1982. Agreement with the proposition that consumer leaders do not consider the cost of what they are asking for also increased by 19 points since 1976, going from 30% to 49%. The biggest absolute increase — of 23 percentage points — is in agreement with the statement that consumer leaders are out of touch with consumers; this increased from 22% in 1976 to 45% in 1982.

Observation:

In three out of five pairs of statements, the increase in criticism still results in a balance of opinion that is favorable to consumer leaders. But the shift – and the possible trend – is clear and perhaps ominous. To some extent this increasing criticism simply may reflect the inevitable cynicism that the public turns on all of its leaders and established institutions today. Such criticism or cynicism may even signify that the public today no longer regards consumer leaders as underdog insurgents and outsiders banging on the door of the "system," but rather as part of the establishment, entrenched in the "system" itself. If that is the case, consumer leaders can perhaps take some satisfaction in it; but it suggests that they may have to learn to live with and to deal with rising criticism and cynicism from which they, like other interest group and government leaders, will not be immune.

Who Feels That Consumer Leaders Reflect Consumers' Feelings or Are Out of Touch?

It is worth examining in more detail one of the most important criticisms, and the one that in absolute terms has risen the most: the feeling that consumer leaders are out of touch with consumers. The public as a whole is now evenly divided on that (45% to 45%). Table 3-5 shows the division within various subgroups of the sample.

Consumer leaders are perceived to be out of touch most frequently in the South, by individuals with less education, by Blacks and Hispanics, by Republicans, and by conservatives. Leaders are seen as reflecting consumers' feelings most frequently in the East, by whites, by the better educated, by the politically independent, and by the ideologically middle-of-the-road.

Those individuals who are most worried over consumer problems on balance tend to see consumer leaders as out of touch. Those who perceive deterioration in the marketplace over the past decade also tend to see consumer leaders as out of touch. Those who believe that government regulation has not done enough to protect the consumer tend to see consumer leaders as out of touch.

This pattern of criticism — both demographic and attitudinal — is a fascinating one. It reflects a different set of coalitions than we have been used to. It suggests that these different groups may be criticizing consumer leaders for different reasons and from different perspectives.

Observation:

Not all of the criticism comes from those whom consumer leaders might consider their traditional opponents. At least some of the criticism comes from those in whose name the leaders would probably like to speak. And this portion of the criticism comes because the consumer leaders are perceived as ***not*** *having done* ***enough*** *to protect the consumer. This seems consistent with the earlier observation that consumer leaders today increasingly may be perceived not as underdog insurgents but rather as part of the established system of interest group bargaining in American politics. This interpretation might also help to explain why Ralph Nader, as reported in Chapter 2, should have become a somewhat less highly rated figure, more open to public criticism today than in 1976.*

Table 3-4
The Images of Consumer Movement Leaders: 1982 and 1976

Q.12: Now I would like to ask you some questions about **"the consumer movement,"** a phrase that has been used to describe the people and organizations who have worked to change products, or services, or advertising, or prices, or after-sales service to give consumers what they consider would be a better deal.

On the whole, do you think that the leaders and spokesmen of the consumer movement *(read each pair of phrases)*?

	Total	
	1982 October	1976 November
Base	1,252	1,510
	%	%
Are **not** troublemakers	62	67
or		
Are troublemakers	24	13
Not sure	15	20
Genuinely want to help consumers	62	72
or		
Are only concerned about helping themselves	30	11
Not sure	8	16
Are reasonable in their criticisms and demands	58	61
or		
Are unreasonable in their criticisms and demands	31	14
Not sure	11	25
Reflect consumers' feelings	45	59
or		
Are out of touch with consumers	45	22
Not sure	10	19
Consider the cost of what they are asking for	40	43
or		
Do not consider the cost of what they are asking for	49	30
Not sure	11	26

Table 3-5
Who Thinks Consumer Leaders Reflect Consumers' Feelings or Are Out of Touch

Q.12a: Now I would like to ask you some questions about **"the consumer movement,"** a phrase that has been used to describe the people and organizations who have worked to change products, or services, or advertising, or prices, or after-sales service to give consumers what they consider would be a better deal. On the whole, do you think that the leaders and spokesmen of the consumer movement reflect consumers' feelings, or are out of touch with consumers?

	1982 October				
	Base		Reflect Consumers' Feelings	Are Out of Touch With Consumers	Not Sure
Total	**1,252**	%	**45**	**45**	**10**
Region					
East	328	%	52	40	8
Midwest	334	%	45	44	11
West	230	%	47	42	11
South	360	%	37	53	10
Age					
18-29 Years	348	%	50	45	5
30-49 Years	482	%	49	43	8
50-64 Years	239	%	36	52	12
65 and over	178	%	40	39	21
Race					
Black	111	%	33	55	12
Hispanic	67	%	30	66	4
White	1,074	%	47	42	10
Education					
8th Grade	75	%	22	57	21
High school	602	%	39	50	11
Some college	281	%	50	43	7
College graduate	290	%	59	33	8
Party identification					
Democrat	501	%	46	45	9
Independent	368	%	50	42	8
Republican	303	%	40	49	11
Political philosophy					
Liberal	251	%	47	44	9
Middle-of-the-road	517	%	52	39	9
Conservative	431	%	38	53	9
Those most worried about consumer concerns	511	%	41	52	7
Perceived change in the consumer environment in the past ten years					
Mainly progress	349	%	53	38	9
Mainly decline	197	%	27	64	9
Perceived adequacy of government regulation to protect consumers (see note)					
It is about right	340	%	55	33	12
It has not done enough	532	%	38	53	9
Those who have been active in or have contributed money to a consumer group	200	%	57	35	8

Note: Attitudes toward government regulation are discussed further in Chapter 4.

What Consumers Want From Government

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Amount of Regulation Preferred in General

Since 1976, public enthusiasm for government regulation of business in general has decreased. When asked the question, "In the future, do you think there should be more government regulation of business, less government regulation, or the same amount as there is now?," 21% today say "more," 41% say "less," and 33% say the "same amount."

This is a considerable shift from 1976 when 31% preferred "more" regulation, 27% "less," and 30% the "same amount."

In 1976, the percentages in the groups that were proregulation and antiregulation were approximately equal. Now, the "more" figure has shrunk by 10 percentage points and the "less" figure has increased by 14 percentage points. Today, the antiregulation group outnumbers the proregulation group by 2:1. Table 4-1 summarizes the shift.

Who Prefers More vs. Less Regulation?

Those most likely to prefer *more* regulation include the youngest age group, Blacks and Hispanics, individuals with low income, those with less education, those in or near cities, liberals, and Democrats. Those most likely to prefer *less* regulation include whites, individuals with higher income, those with higher education, those removed from cities, conservatives, and independents and Republicans. Table 4-2 indicates feelings about regulation at this general level among various subgroups of the population.

Observation:

With regard to the degree to which government should intervene in the private sector, this line-up of groups reveals two familiar coalitions facing one another across the traditional New Deal battleline.

But, clearly, many groups are less keen today than they once were on government regulation as an abstract principle.

Views on Regulation in Specific Areas

The picture becomes more subtle and complex when one turns from regulation in *general* to regulation in *specific* cases. Antiregulatory opinion at the abstract

Table 4-1
Amount of Government Regulation of Business Preferred in General: 1982 and1976

Q.3: In the future, do you think there should be more government regulation of business, less government regulation, or the same amount as there is now?

	Total	
	October 1982	November 1976
Base	1,252	1,510
	%	%
More	21	31
Same	33	30
Less	41	27
Not sure	5	12

Table 4-2
Amount of Government Regulation of Business Preferred in General by Various Groups

Q.3: In the future, do you think there should be more government regulation of business, less government regulation, or the same amount as there is now?

	1982 October					
	Base		More	Same	Less	Not Sure
Total	1,252	%	21	33	41	5
Sex						
Female	646	%	21	35	37	7
Male	606	%	21	31	45	3
Age						
18-29 Years	348	%	28	39	31	2
30-49 Years	482	%	21	29	46	4
50-64 Years	239	%	14	33	49	5
65 and over	178	%	16	33	40	11
Race						
Black	111	%	38	32	22	8
Hispanic	67	%	44	27	25	4
White	1,074	%	18	34	44	4
Household income						
$7,500 or less	146	%	27	33	32	8
$7,501-$15,000	248	%	28	34	33	5
$15,001-$25,000	348	%	20	37	41	2
$25,001-$35,000	207	%	17	35	44	4
$35,001-$50,000	131	%	16	34	46	5
$50,001 and over	81	%	14	24	59	3
Education						
8th Grade	75	%	25	41	25	9
High school	602	%	25	32	38	5
Some college	281	%	16	36	45	3
College graduate	290	%	17	30	48	5
Party identification						
Democrat	501	%	28	34	33	6
Independent	368	%	17	31	49	3
Republican	303	%	15	35	46	4
Political philosophy						
Liberal	251	%	34	29	30	7
Middle-of-the-road	517	%	21	37	38	4
Conservative	431	%	13	32	51	4
Perceived impact of government regulation on prices						
It has raised prices	761	%	19	26	51	4
It has not raised prices	429	%	24	46	26	4
Place of residence						
City	364	%	28	31	34	7
Suburb	345	%	21	31	43	5
Town	192	%	16	37	44	3
Rural	351	%	16	36	44	4

level does not automatically translate into public disfavor with all forms of regulation. Quite the contrary, the public strongly favors many specific types of regulation. Table 4-3 shows public reaction to government intervention in seven specific areas.

The seven specific areas divide into two distinct types: instances of *protective* intervention and instances of *economic* intervention. Consumers are very much in favor of the former but much less in favor of the latter.

Ninety-four percent of the public think that the government should approve new drugs before the drugs can be sold. Eighty-eight percent think the government should approve new toys for safety before the toys go on the market. Sixty-seven percent think the government should decide whether television advertisements are misleading and should not be shown. Thus, when it comes to protective regulation, solid majorities of the public endorse it.

But when it comes to economic regulation, that is, government intervention in the marketplace, these majorities become much less solid. Only 52% of the public think the government should decide what rate of interest lenders can charge borrowers. Fifty percent think the government should forbid mergers and acquisitions of companies that might reduce competition. Just 36% think the government should prevent manufacturers from operating stores that sell their own products. And only 36% think the government should control the prices of consumer products.

The earlier discussion of regulation in general obscures this important distinction between two major types of regulation in specific instances. As Table 4-3 shows, even those people who want "less" regulation in general solidly endorse government intervention in the three specific areas of protective regulation. Of those who want less regulation in general, 92% say the government should approve new drugs, 81% say the government should approve new toys, and 56% say the government should decide whether television advertisements are misleading.

Observation:

Consumers seem to make an important distinction between protective intervention or regulation by government on the one hand and economic intervention or regulation on the other. The three protective-type questions average 83% endorsement. The four economic-type questions average only 44% endorsement.

Strategists and policymakers need to keep this set of distinctions in mind. Public enthusiasm for regulation can be shown to be higher in many specific instances than it is in general. It is especially high when the specific instances are those involving public health and safety.

The Status Quo vs. Change in Protective Regulation

Questions of whether government "should" or "shouldn't" intervene can obscure another important distinction. Of the large percentage of consumers who say the government "should" intervene, many simply may be endorsing what they believe to be the regulatory status quo. If so, we would be correct in predicting that they would reject any rollback or dismantling of protective regulation. But we might be wrong if we counted on them to support new and additional government intervention.

Respondents were confronted with four specific areas of protective intervention and were asked whether regulation is "about right," has "gone too far," or has "not done enough." Endorsement of government intervention can be indicated by answers of *either* "about right" *or* "not done enough," but these answers allow for the further distinction between approval of the status quo and support for new intervention.

The distinction turns out to be a significant one. Table 4-4 shows once again that consumers overwhelmingly favor protective regulation. Even those who prefer "less" regulation in general think that protective regulation ought to remain at least at its present level. Hardly anyone thinks the

Table 4-3
Evaluations of Specific Types of Government Regulation

Q.8: Here are some things that the government **might** be involved in now or in the future. For each, tell me whether you think the government should or should not be involved. Should or shouldn't the government *(read each item)*?

	1982 October			
		Preferred Amount of Regulation in General		
	Total	More	Same	Less
Base	1,252	263	422	512
	%	%	%	%
Three types of protective intervention				
Approve new drugs before they are allowed to be sold				
Should	94	97	94	92
Shouldn't	5	3	5	6
Not sure	1	—	1	2
Approve new toys for safety before they come on the market				
Should	88	96	92	81
Shouldn't	10	3	7	17
Not sure	1	1	1	2
Decide whether television advertisements are misleading and should not be shown				
Should	67	82	70	56
Shouldn't	31	18	28	41
Not sure	2	*	1	2
Four types of economic intervention				
Decide what rate of interest lenders can charge borrowers				
Should	52	67	60	37
Shouldn't	43	30	36	59
Not sure	5	3	4	4
Forbid mergers and acquisitions of companies that government officials think would reduce competition				
Should	50	60	54	43
Shouldn't	43	33	41	50
Not sure	7	7	5	7
Prevent manufacturers who produce products from operating stores that sell those products				
Should	36	47	38	28
Shouldn't	58	48	56	66
Not sure	7	5	6	6
Control the prices of consumer products				
Should	36	59	41	18
Shouldn't	61	40	55	79
Not sure	3	1	3	3

*Less than 0.5%.

Table 4-4
Status Quo vs. Change in Four Specific Areas of Protective Intervention

Q.9: Do you think that government regulation is about right, has gone too far, or has not done enough in trying to protect the consumer against (products that are dangerous/misleading packaging and labeling/inadequate guarantees and warranties/companies that fail to live up to their advertising claims)?

	1982 October			
		Preferred Amount of Regulation in General		
	Total	More	Same	Less
Base	1,252	263	422	512
	%	%	%	%
Companies that fail to live up to their advertising claims				
Not done enough	59	72	58	53
About right	32	21	37	36
Gone too far	5	5	3	6
Not sure	4	2	2	5
Inadequate guarantees and warranties				
Not done enough	51	69	53	39
About right	40	25	42	47
Gone too far	5	4	2	9
Not sure	4	2	3	5
Misleading packaging and labeling				
Not done enough	48	67	47	38
About right	42	26	48	47
Gone too far	7	4	4	11
Not sure	3	3	2	4
Products that are dangerous				
Not done enough	48	73	45	35
About right	37	21	48	37
Gone too far	12	5	6	23
Not sure	3	1	1	5
Perceived adequacy of government regulation to protect consumers: Combined Index (see note)				
It has not done enough, mainly	42	64	39	32
It is about right, mainly	27	13	30	32
It has gone too far, mainly	3	3	*	6
Mixed views	(28)	(20)	(31)	(30)

*Less than 0.5%.

Note: The Combined Index, constructed from the above four items, categorizes respondents by the **main pattern** of their answers. Respondents who answer "not done enough" on at least three of the four questions are coded on the index as "not done enough, mainly." Respondents who answer "about right" on at least three of the four questions are coded on the index as "about right, mainly." Respondents who answer "gone too far" on at least three of the four questions are coded on the index as "gone too far, mainly." Respondents who have mixed patterns of answers are coded on the index as "mixed views."

government has gone too far in this area. But proponents of intervention clearly divide into two camps: those who are satisfied with the regulatory status quo and those who would support new and additional government intervention.

Thus, 91% of the public endorse government protection against companies that fail to live up to their advertising claims, but that endorsement breaks into 32% who say the current regulatory level is "about right" and 59% who think the government has "not done enough." Ninety-one percent also approve of government protection against inadequate guarantees and warranties, but that approval separates into 40% who think the current protection is "about right" and 51% who think government has "not done enough." Ninety percent endorse government protection against misleading packaging and labeling, but that endorsement splits into 42% who approve of the regulatory status quo and 48% who would welcome further intervention. Eighty-five percent approve of government protection against products that are dangerous, but that approval divides into 37% who think current levels are adequate and 48% who think not enough is being done.

In each of the four specific areas, a plurality of consumers say that the government has "not done enough." That plurality varies in size from 48% to 59% over the four areas, and it outnumbers those who think that the government has "gone too far" by ratios ranging from 4:1 to as much as 12:1. This is a politically important indicator of the magnitude of public support for new regulatory initiatives in the consumer protection field. But just as important for both proregulation and antiregulation strategists is the fact that a substantial proportion of those who approve of protective regulation are simply endorsing the regulatory status quo.

Who Is Satisfied? Who Would Welcome Additional Regulation?

Overall, 27% of consumers indicate that they are satisfied with the regulatory status quo. Forty-two percent of consumers gave a pattern of responses that indicate that they would welcome additional regulation.

A combined index, constructed from the four questions already discussed, allows examination of the attitudes of subgroups of the consumer population. Those who say that protective regulation is "about right" in at least three of the four specific areas are shown in one column of Table 4-5. Those who say protective regulation has "not done enough" in at least three of the four specific areas are shown in another column of Table 4-5. Not shown are those who say government has "gone too far" in at least three of the four specific areas because they account for only 3% of the sample. Also not shown are those who have mixed views.

Groups that tend to be relatively satisfied with current regulation include whites, college graduates, those living in towns, middle-of-the-roaders and conservatives, and Republicans. Those groups who tend to welcome additional government intervention to protect consumers include women, Blacks and Hispanics, the poor, the lesser educated, city residents, liberals, and Democrats.

Observation:

This line-up of groups is similar to that discovered in the case of attitudes toward regulation in general. It reflects classic coalitions divided by New Deal battlelines. In the case of protective regulation in specific areas, however, the battle is shown to be not over more vs. less regulation, but rather between the regulatory status quo and increased government intervention. Hardly any support at all is found for regulatory rollback or dismantling in the consumer protection area.

Interpreting Public Ambivalence About Business, Government, and Regulation

An appreciation of how people stand vis-à-vis the regulatory status quo in protective intervention can be an aid in interpreting the seeming public ambivalence that one sometimes detects in public opinion polls. Table 4-6 presents two pairs of agree/disagree questions of a type often encountered in public opinion polls.

Table 4-5
Attitudes Toward Government Regulation to Protect the Consumer in Specific Areas: Who Is Satisfied, Who Sees It as Insufficient

Q.9: Do you think that government regulation is about right, has gone too far, or has not done enough in trying to protect the consumer against (products that are dangerous/misleading packaging and labeling/inadequate guarantees and warranties/companies that fail to live up to their advertising claims)?

	1982 October			
			Perceived Adequacy of Government Regulation to Protect Consumers (Combined Index)	
	Base		It Is About Right, Mainly	It Has Not Done Enough, Mainly
Total	1,252	%	27	42
Sex				
Female	646	%	26	47
Male	606	%	27	38
Race				
Black	111	%	18	61
Hispanic	67	%	18	59
White	1,074	%	28	39
Household income				
$7,500 or less	146	%	17	53
$7,501-$15,000	248	%	24	46
$15,001-$25,000	348	%	26	43
$25,001-$35,000	207	%	35	41
$35,001-$50,000	131	%	29	38
$50,001 and over	81	%	27	31
Education				
8th Grade	75	%	14	52
High school	602	%	23	49
Some college	281	%	29	34
College graduate	290	%	36	34
Party identification				
Democrat	501	%	22	50
Independent	368	%	29	40
Republican	303	%	34	32
Political philosophy				
Liberal	251	%	18	57
Middle-of-the-road	517	%	29	42
Conservative	431	%	30	34
Perceived impact of government regulation on prices				
It has raised prices	761	%	29	38
It has not raised prices	429	%	22	51
Place of residence				
City	364	%	24	48
Suburb	345	%	27	41
Town	192	%	32	34
Rural	351	%	26	42

Note: The Combined Index of "perceived adequacy of government regulation to protect consumers" is defined in the note to Table 4-4. Not shown here are those who believe government regulation has "gone too far" in at least three of the four areas (3%), and those who have mixed views (28%).

Table 4-6
Attitudes Toward Business, Government, and Regulation: Some Seeming Contradictions

Q.2: Now I'm going to read you a number of statements. For each, would you tell me if you agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly?

	1982 October		
		Perceived Adequacy of Government Regulation to Protect Consumers	
	Total	It Is About Right, Mainly	It Has Not Done Enough, Mainly
Base	1,252	340	532
	%	%	%
Most companies do a good job of providing reasonable products at fair prices			
Agree	62	71	54
Disagree	35		
Neither/not sure	2		
If companies were left to themselves and not regulated by government, the consumer would get a much worse deal			
Agree	56	54	60
Disagree	40		
Neither/not sure	3		
On the whole, government regulation has done a good job of protecting the interests of consumers			
Agree	61	71	59
Disagree	36		
Neither/not sure	3		
On the whole, government regulation has done more to help business than to protect the consumer			
Agree	53	48	61
Disagree	41		
Neither/not sure	6		

Note: The Combined Index of "perceived adequacy of government regulation to protect consumers" is defined in the note to Table 4-4.

In the top pair, the first statement praises business and the second statement criticizes it. In the bottom pair, the first statement praises government regulation and the second statement criticizes it. The amount of resonance that each statement has with the public is reflected in the percentage who agree with those statements.

As Table 4-6 shows, a majority of the public agree with all four statements. The size of the majority is somewhat larger for the two statements that offer praise than for the two statements that criticize business and government, but there is majority agreement in each of the four cases.

Patterns such as these, which appear quite frequently in public opinion polls, are sometimes attributed solely to confusion, mixed views, or ambivalence on the part of the public. The public seems at the same time to have faith in business and to be suspicious of business, to have faith in government regulation of business and to be suspicious of the government/business relationship.

Indeed there is a group of ambivalent people who do agree with both the praise as well as the criticism, but these overall figures tend to hide much of what is happening, while the additional breakdowns in Table 4-6 permit us to look below the surface. What seems to be occurring is that as we pass from praise to criticism of current business or government regulation, some of those consumers who are satisfied with the regulatory status quo drop off. These satisfied people, who say the regulatory status quo is "about right," tend to agree overwhelmingly (71%) with the two statements that praise current business and government. They show much less agreement with the two critical statements. On the other hand, those who are impatient with the status quo, who say government regulation has "not done enough," *increase* their agreement as we pass from the statements praising current business and government to the statements criticizing them. For these anti-status-quo people, the criticisms have more resonance than the praise.

Thus, although all four statements elicit majority agreement from the public as a whole, the mix of the public for the two statements praising business and government regulation is different from what it is for the two statements criticizing them. The majority who praise current business and government regulation contain relatively more individuals who are satisfied with the regulatory status quo and relatively fewer who are impatient with it. The majority who criticize current business and government regulation contain relatively more who are impatient with the regulatory status quo and relatively fewer who are satisfied with it.

Observation:

This shifting mix below the surface happens to result in majority agreement to all four statements. But it would not seem to be due solely to ambivalence in the public mind, although many people do have mixed views or do feel ambivalent, to be sure. Rather, the majorities who agree are composed of different aggregates of people, depending on whether the statement praises the current status quo in business and government or is critical of it.

Attitudes Toward Deregulation in Two Industries

One concept that has been implemented since the 1976 survey is that of deregulation. In commercial radio, the trucking industry, the oil industry, and the airline industry, regulations have been reduced so that marketplace forces can exert greater influence. The 1982 survey questioned consumers about deregulation in the two industries that the average consumer might have the most contact with: airlines and oil. Table 4-7 presents the results.

A solid majority of 58% think that deregulation of the airline industry has been *good* for the consumer. An even more solid majority of 67% think that deregulation of the oil industry has been *bad* for the consumer. Minorities of 35% to 30% took the opposite view in each case, respectively. Remarkably, in light of the complicated nature of price regulation or deregulation, only 5% or fewer felt unable to offer a judgment.

Table 4-7
Views of Deregulation in Two Industries

Q.11a: In the past few years, several industries have been deregulated, which means that government regulations have been reduced. Because of deregulation, since 1978, **airlines** have not been subject to government price controls. Airlines can now decide for themselves what services to offer and what prices to charge. Overall, do you think this has been good or bad for the consumer?

	1982 October			
		Preferred Amount of Regulation in General		
	Total	More	Same	Less
Base	1,252	263	422	512
	%	%	%	%
Good for consumers	58	42	59	69
Bad for consumers	35	51	36	24
Both (volunteered)	1	1	1	1
No change (volunteered)	1	2	1	*
Not sure	5	4	3	5

Q.11b: Because of deregulation, since 1981, **oil companies** have not been subject to government price controls. Oil companies can now decide for themselves what prices to charge for gasoline. Overall, do you think this has been good or bad for the consumer?

	1982 October			
		Preferred Amount of Regulation in General		
	Total	More	Same	Less
Base	1,252	263	422	512
	%	%	%	%
Good for consumers	30	16	27	43
Bad for consumers	67	82	70	54
Both (volunteered)	1	*	1	1
No change (volunteered)	1	1	1	*
Not sure	1	1	1	2

*Less than 0.5%

Consumers react to deregulation in part according to their views about regulation in general. In the case of both the airlines and the oil companies, those who prefer "less" regulation as a general principle are 27 percentage points more likely to think deregulation has been *good* for the consumer than those who prefer "more" regulation as a general principle. Conversely, those who prefer "more" regulation as a general principle are more likely than those who prefer "less" by 27 or 28 percentage points to think that deregulation has been *bad* for consumers.

But consumers also seem to react to deregulation in part according to their experience with or their view of each industry. When we turn from airlines to oil companies, enthusiasm for deregulation drops by 28 percentage points — from 58% to 30%. This drop in support for deregulation occurs regardless of consumers' attitudes toward regulation in general. Thus, even those individuals who prefer "less" regulation as a general principle distinguish between the two industries: 69% think deregulation of airlines has been good for consumers, while only 43% of them think deregulation of oil industry pricing has been good for the consumer.

Observation:

Consumers cannot be expected to know much about the actual details of pricing in these two industries either before or after controls were lifted. Many are probably reacting on the basis of their view of the two industries in general, a view that other surveys have shown to be fairly favorable in the case of airlines and quite unfavorable in the case of oil companies. Some consumers may also be reacting to their (accurate or inaccurate) perception of the price changes in each industry following deregulation. Other consumers may be reacting not to ***changes*** *in price, but simply to the* ***absolute*** *price level in each industry and to their own sense of whether it is fair or unfair.*

As additional industries become deregulated and the public gains experience with the results, future surveys can determine to a greater extent consumers' views about the concept of deregulation

The Costs of Consumer Protection

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Has Consumer Protection Raised the Price of Products and Services?

A solid majority (61%) perceive that *government regulation* of business has resulted in higher prices; 29% say regulation has made no difference, and 6% see an actual lowering of prices. Forty-five percent think that *demands by the consumer movement* have resulted in higher prices; 39% think the demands have made no difference, and 11% see a lowering of prices.

Table 5-1 and Table 5-2 summarize the results and also show breakdowns by educational attainment and by self-described political philosophy. There is remarkably little variation by educational group. There is, however, a tendency for the least educated group, those with an eighth grade education or less, to perceive things somewhat differently. This group, many of whom are over the age of 65, tend to be a bit less certain of the impact on prices, to think more frequently that government regulation has lowered prices, and to think more than the other education groups that the consumer movement has raised prices. The other education groups are in unusual agreement in their perceptions. This suggests widespread images and widely shared perceptions about the impact on prices.

Perceptions also do not vary much by political philosophy. Conservatives are only slightly more likely than liberals to say that government regulation and the consumer movement have raised prices. This reinforces the pattern that images in this area are commonly shared without great dissimilarities from group to group.

Indeed, when all the other standard demographic categories are examined, there is widespread agreement on this subject. It seems that consumers are reaching a similar judgment in this area — whether from personal experience, media reports, or "guesstimates" — as a result of common stimuli. That judgment is that consumer protection often raises prices.

Are Such Improvements in Quality and Safety Worth the Extra Cost?

A majority of consumers believe that the costs of consumer protection are worth it. Sixty-one percent say that the extra costs for quality and safety due to *government regulation* of business are worth it; 34% disagree and 5% aren't sure. Fifty-four percent say

Table 5-1
Perceived Impact on Prices Due to Government Regulation of Business

Q.10: On balance, do you think that government regulation of business has resulted in higher prices, lower prices, or has made no difference in prices?

1982 October

		Education				Political Philosophy		
	Total	8th Grade	High School	Some College	College Graduate	Liberal	Middle-of-the-Road	Conservative
Base	1,252	75	62	281	290	251	517	431
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Higher prices	61	50	61	61	63	55	60	64
No difference	29	28	28	28	31	33	30	26
Lower prices	6	10	6	6	5	8	5	6
Not sure	5	11	6	5	2	4	5	4

Table 5-2
Perceived Impact on Prices Due to the Consumer Movement

Q.15: On balance, do you think that the demands by the consumer movement have resulted in higher prices, lower prices, or have made no difference in prices?

	1982 October							
		Education				Political Philosophy		
	Total	8th Grade	High School	Some College	College Graduate	Liberal	Middle-of-the-Road	Conservative
Base	1,252	75	602	281	290	251	517	431
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Higher prices	45	60	44	43	45	40	45	46
No difference	39	23	38	42	41	41	40	38
Lower prices	11	10	12	11	11	14	11	11
Not sure	5	7	6	4	3	5	4	5

that extra costs for quality and safety due to pressure from the *consumer movement* are worth it; 41% disagree and 5% aren't sure.

Table 5-3 and Table 5-4 summarize the above results and show the data breakdowns for many subgroups of society.

Who Believes or Does Not Believe That the Extra Costs Are Worth It?

Groups most likely to think that the extra costs are worth it include Easterners, the young, individuals with middle and higher income, and those with higher education. In the case of the impact of *government regulation* on prices, middle-of-the-roaders and liberals are more likely to think the extra costs worth it, but there was not much difference by political party. In the case of the impact of the *consumer movement* on prices, ideological middle-of-the-roaders and liberals and political independents are more likely to think the extra costs worth it.

Groups most likely to think the extra costs *not* worthwhile include: Southerners, persons aged 50 and over, those with lower income, those with least education, and conservatives.

These two groupings of people are not precisely the two coalitions so familiar since New Deal days. There is a hint of New Deal cleavage here, but clearly also involved are generational factors that may influence the appeal of any new movement like consumerism; ability to pay, which may influence whether any given cost seems "worth" it; and educational attainment, which may open people to new and nontraditional kinds of issue appeals. These three factors cut across the older New Deal cleavages and produce two somewhat new and different coalitions in the consumer protection field.

Observation:

Consumers tend to agree that consumer protection sometimes raises prices. But they also agree that such protection is worth the extra cost. On the question of whether the cost is worth it, the traditional and familiar New Deal disputes become muffled and coalitions become rearranged.

Thus, the affluent find the costs of consumerism more worthwhile than do the poor, and college educated people find the costs of consumerism more worthwhile than do the lesser educated. These findings are a basis for some people to consider consumerism as a middle class and upper middle class movement. There is also some basis for considering consumerism as an "independent" movement; ideological middle-of-the-roaders and political independents are more likely than ideological purists or political partisans to consider the extra costs of consumer protection to be worthwhile.

Table 5-3
Who Believes That Changes in Products and Services Due to Government Regulation of Business Are Worth the Extra Cost

Q.18: Government regulation of business to improve the quality and safety of products sometimes raises prices. Do you think such changes in quality and safety are or are not generally worth the extra cost?

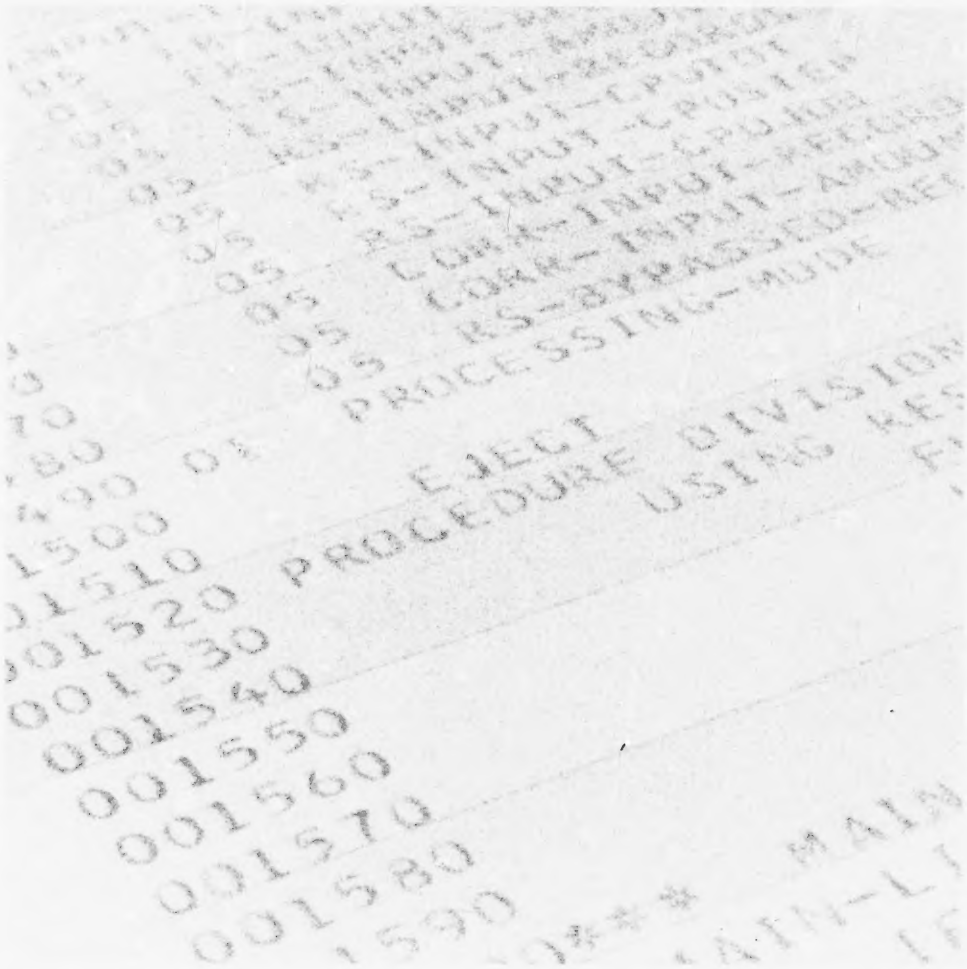
	1982 October				
	Base		Generally Worth Extra Cost	Generally Not Worth Extra Cost	Not Sure
Total	1,252	%	61	34	5
Region					
East	328	%	70	27	3
Midwest	334	%	60	35	5
West	230	%	61	35	4
South	360	%	53	40	7
Age					
18-29 Years	348	%	71	27	2
30-49 Years	482	%	60	37	4
50-64 Years	239	%	55	39	5
65 and over	178	%	50	38	12
Household income					
$7,500 or less	146	%	46	42	12
$7,501-$15,000	248	%	61	37	2
$15,001-$25,000	348	%	66	29	4
$25,001-$35,000	207	%	64	32	3
$35,001-$50,000	131	%	67	31	2
$50,001 and over	81	%	61	35	4
Education					
8th Grade	75	%	41	44	15
High school	602	%	58	37	5
Some college	281	%	67	30	3
College graduate	290	%	66	31	3
Party identification					
Democrat	501	%	63	33	4
Independent	368	%	61	35	5
Republican	303	%	58	37	5
Political philosophy					
Liberal	251	%	67	29	4
Middle-of-the-road	517	%	65	31	4
Conservative	431	%	56	39	5
Perceived impact of government regulation on prices (before being told)					
It has raised prices	761	%	58	38	4
It has not raised prices	429	%	68	29	3

Table 5-4
Who Believes That Changes in Products and Services Due to the Consumer Movement Are Worth the Extra Cost

Q.17: Changes in products or services, which have been made as a result of pressure from the consumer movement to improve their quality and safety, often raise prices. Do you think the changes are or are not generally worth the extra cost?

			1982 October		
	Base		Generally Worth Extra Cost	Generally Not Worth Extra Cost	Not Sure
Total	**1,251**	%	**54**	**41**	**5**
Region					
East	328	%	61	34	5
Midwest	334	%	55	39	6
West	229	%	54	42	4
South	360	%	46	48	6
Age					
18-29 Years	347	%	64	35	1
30-49 Years	482	%	57	40	3
50-64 Years	239	%	45	49	6
65 and over	178	%	39	45	16
Household income					
$7,500 or less	146	%	41	47	12
$7,501-$15,000	248	%	46	48	6
$15,001-$25,000	348	%	59	37	4
$25,001-$35,000	207	%	62	35	3
$35,001-$50,000	130	%	60	38	2
$50,001 and over	91	%	59	41	—
Education					
8th Grade	75	%	36	46	18
High school	602	%	49	46	5
Some college	281	%	61	35	5
College graduate	289	%	64	35	2
Party identification					
Democrat	500	%	52	43	5
Independent	368	%	58	37	5
Republican	303	%	53	41	6
Political philosophy					
Liberal	250	%	56	39	5
Middle-of-the-road	517	%	59	38	3
Conservative	431	%	50	44	6
Perceived impact of the consumer movement on prices (before being told)					
It has raised prices	563	%	45	51	4
It has not raised prices	623	%	63	33	4

Markets, Competition, Information, and Consumer Choice



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Shopping Around for the Best Buy

Across different categories of products and services, consumers report considerable differences in their ability to shop around for the best buy. The market for food and the market for gasoline are reported to be the easiest in which to shop around. Sixty-nine percent say it is easy to shop around for the best buy on food. Sixty-eight percent say it is easy to shop around for the best buy on gasoline.

The market for credit and the market for doctors are reported to be the most difficult in which to shop around. Seventy-four percent say it is difficult to comparison shop for doctors. Fifty-seven percent say it is difficult to comparison shop for the best buy on credit. Forty-one percent also say it is difficult to shop around for new cars.

The market for electrical appliances is reported by consumers to be of intermediate ease or difficulty in which to shop around. Table 6-1 shows these results in full detail.

Differences in Value for the Money

When people do shop around, how much difference in value for their money do they expect to find? Forty percent think big differences in value would be found in the case of doctors. Only 24% think big differences in value would be found in the case of gasoline.

Table 6-2 presents these findings in full. New cars rank toward the top in terms of big differences in value. Food and credit rank toward the bottom in terms of value differences found upon shopping around.

Comparing the Two Rankings

Is there any connection between ease or difficulty of shopping around for the best buy on the one hand and value for money that consumers expect on the other hand? It is instructive to compare the rankings in Table 6-1 and Table 6-2.

Table 6-1
Shopping Around for the Best Buy on Six Types of Products or Services

Q.5: I will read you a short list of various products and services. Please say, for each one, **how easy or difficult** it is for consumers to check prices and value, in order to **shop around** for the best buy. Is it very easy, somewhat easy, somewhat difficult, or very difficult for consumers to shop around for (READ EACH ITEM)?

		1982 October				
Base: 1,252		Very Easy	Somewhat Easy	Somewhat Difficult	Very Difficult	Not Sure
Food	%	42	27	21	9	1
Gasoline	%	41	27	19	11	2
Electrical appliances	%	34	35	22	8	1
New cars	%	28	27	24	17	4
Credit	%	18	18	33	24	7
Doctors	%	11	13	30	44	2

50 Consumers perceive it to be easy to shop around for food and gasoline, markets in which information is easily available, in which there are many vendors, and in which prices are well posted or well advertised. Since these markets are also ones that consumers frequent regularly, consumers can develop judgment through personal experience. Such markets also tend to be competitive ones.

Consumers perceive it to be much more difficult to shop around for credit and doctors, markets in which information is less abundant or less easily obtained, in which there are fewer or less accessible vendors, and in which prices are less publicly posted or advertised. These markets are also ones that consumers frequent less regularly; consequently, consumers tend to have less secure judgment about them. In addition, these markets may seem more technical and complicated to consumers and they are often characterized by longstanding relationships. Such factors set up barriers to shopping around for the best buy. Also, such markets tend to be less competitive.

If there is, in fact, a strong relationship between information, competition, and ease of shopping, on the one hand, and value for the money on the other, we would expect to see "difficult shopping" categories ranked high for potential differences in value, and "easy shopping" categories ranked low. Such is the relationship we see for five of the six categories:

— Gasoline and food, ranked high for ease of shopping, rank low in potential differences in value.

— Doctors and new cars, ranked low for ease of shopping, rank high in potential differences in value.

— Electrical appliances fall in the middle on both measures.

Credit does not fit the pattern: It is perceived as difficult for shopping but low in potential differences in value. Thus, other factors may play a role. In the case of credit, consumers may perceive that effective competition is occurring even in the

Table 6-2
Difference in Value for the Money for Six Types of Products or Services

Q.6: I will read the list of products and services again. If people **did** shop around in your area for the best buy, how much difference in value for the money do you think they would find? Would they find big differences in value for the money, small differences in value for the money, or no differences, when shopping for (READ EACH ITEM)?

		1982 October			
Base: 1,252		Big Differences	Small Differences	No Differences	Not Sure
Doctors	%	40	33	20	7
New cars	%	37	44	13	6
Electrical appliances	%	31	53	12	4
Food	%	29	62	8	1
Credit	%	28	44	18	10
Gasoline	%	24	63	11	2

absence of price visibility, or they may be relying upon government regulation of interest rates to limit the range of potential charges.

It should be pointed out that consumers do not expect immense differences in value for money overall. No more than 40% of consumers say they expect big differences in any one of the six products or services.

Observation:

The findings regarding doctors are consistent with the judgment of many specialists that price is seldom a factor in consumers' choice of physicians and, thus, that doctor's fees are not very sensitive to market forces.

Government and business leaders, increasingly concerned about the high price of health care, are currently considering ways to introduce more competition into the health care field. If they are successful in these plans, then future polls might be expected to register increased ease in shopping for doctors and fewer perceived differences in value for money spent on medical care.

Sources of Information Rated by Consumers

In shopping around in various markets — whether easy ones or difficult ones — what sources of information do consumers rely on? Seven sources are presented and ranked in Table 6-3.

Topping the list in terms of reliability are articles in independent consumer magazines like *Consumer Reports*. Forty-eight percent say this source is "very reliable," and 87% find it to be at least "somewhat reliable." Next to the top as a reliable source is information from the manufacturer on or inside the package. Thirty-two percent report this source to be "very reliable" and 86% say it is at least "somewhat reliable."

In terms of reliability, advertising by manufacturers is at the bottom of the list. Only 9% find this source to be "very reliable" while 38% report it to be not reliable. Next to the bottom is advice from retailers about the products they sell. Eleven percent find this to be "very reliable" while 27% report it to be not reliable.

Consumers clearly believe that the different sources vary in their degree of reliability. It should be noted, however, that all seven sources, including even the lowest ranked, provoke a majority to rate them as at least "somewhat reliable." Thus, even the lowest ranked source was rated reasonably well in an absolute sense.

Beliefs About Competition

Consumers believe that benefits derive from competition. But they also acknowledge that oligopoly and bigness are sometimes the end result. Table 6-4 presents the data. Eighty-three percent of consumers think that competition among companies is the best way to keep prices down. Eighty-five percent agree that competition among companies is the best way to insure a wide variety of products and services. Thus they would seem to endorse or to prefer markets of the "easy-shopping" and high-information type, discussed earlier.

At the same time, consumers agree in overwhelming proportion with a frequent criticism of competition. Seventy-one percent think that competition often drives out the small companies in an industry so that only big companies survive.

Observation:

Americans respond in favor of the idea of "competition," a notion that is a positive symbol in the American social and political lexicon. Americans respond in opposition to "bigness," a notion that past polls have shown to have negative symbolism for many people.

Table 6-3
Sources of Consumer Information Rated on Reliability

Q.4: Here are some different ways people can find out about the products they buy. Please say, for each one, how reliable you think it usually is — very reliable, somewhat reliable, not very reliable, or not at all reliable?

		1982 October				
Base: 1,252		Very Reliable	Somewhat Reliable	Not Very Reliable	Not at All Reliable	Not Sure
Articles in independent consumer magazines like *Consumer Reports*	%	48	39	6	3	5
Information from the manufacturer on or inside the package	%	32	54	10	2	1
Advice from friends and relatives about products	%	27	52	16	4	1
Consumer news coverage in magazines and newspapers	%	19	60	15	4	2
Consumer news coverage on television and radio	%	19	54	20	5	2
Advice from retailers about the products they sell	%	11	61	22	5	1
Advertising by manufacturers	%	9	52	31	7	1

Table 6-4
Reaction to Three Statements About Competition

Q.2: Now I'm going to read you a number of statements. For each, would you tell me if you agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly?

		1982 October		
Base: 1,252		Agree	Disagree	Neither/ Not Sure
Competition among companies is the best way to keep prices down	%	83	16	1
Competition among companies is the best way to insure a wide variety of products and services	%	85	14	1
Competition often drives out the small companies in an industry so that only big companies survive	%	71	27	1

Credit and Credit Cards
as a Consumer Issue

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The issues of credit and of the cost of credit have arisen at several points in this report — in the chapter on consumer worries (Chapter 1), in the chapter on regulation (Chapter 4), and in the chapter on markets, information, and consumer choice (Chapter 6). Table 7-1 draws together these data.

Worry About Credit

Most consumers are relatively unworried about the difficulty of obtaining credit. But most *are* concerned about the high rate of interest charged on credit. Only 36% say they are worried "a great deal" or "somewhat" about obtaining credit; 76% are worried "a great deal" or "somewhat" about the price of credit. Blacks and Hispanics are worried more about both concerns than are whites. Availability is much more of a worry for individuals in the lower income brackets, while high interest rates tend to worry those in each income bracket. Availability is a bigger concern to the young than it is to older, more established age groups; interest rates worry the young and middle aged alike and the oldest group somewhat less.

Shopping Around for Credit

Credit is seen as one of the more difficult things for which to shop around. Fifty-seven percent of consumers say it is "very difficult" or "somewhat difficult" to shop around for the best buy on credit. It is somewhat surprising, then, that consumers do not perceive big differences in value for their money in the credit market. Sixty-two percent say that they would not find a big difference in value for their money when shopping for credit. In other markets (such as in shopping for doctors), there is a tendency for a "difficult shopping" market to also be perceived as a market with big differences in value. One explanation for this anomaly may be that consumers assume that credit markets are tightly controlled by regulation.

Government Regulation of Interest Rates

The survey did not measure consumers' perceptions of how tightly regulated various markets actually *are*. But the survey did measure whether consumers thought that various markets *should* be regulated. Overall, 52% think the government should decide the rate of interest lenders can charge borrowers; 43% disagree. Subgroups do not seem to disagree very vehemently about this issue. Blacks are slightly more likely than whites to favor such controls. The young are only slightly more likely than their elders to favor controls. And the various income brackets do not disagree very strongly or consistently. One possible reason is that rate of interest on credit may mean different things, and thus present different issues, to these various groups. It may involve retail charge accounts for some, home mortgages for others, or financing for capital investment for yet others. Another possible reason why various groups disagree so little over the desirability of regulating interest rates is that they may, as speculated above, believe that interest rates are already tightly regulated.

Usage of Credit Cards

The survey also examined consumers' usage of credit cards. Sixty-eight percent say their household has used one or more types of credit card in the past twelve months; 31% say their household used none. Whites are more likely than Blacks to have used credit cards, and individuals in the higher income brackets are more likely than those in the lower income brackets to have used cards. Credit card usage has a mild connection with age, with people aged 30 to 49 reporting highest usage, and with usage dropping off slightly among both younger people and older people.

Perceived Advantages and Disadvantages of Credit Cards

Feelings about credit cards were probed by six agree/disagree statements, which are presented in Table 7-2. Each statement presents a generalization about credit cards; some are generalizations of a factual nature and others are of an evaluative nature. Fifty-eight percent of consumers agree that being able to shop with credit cards is a great help to consumers. People in higher income brackets are most likely to agree with that. But consumers see benefits from credit cards to others than themselves. Seventy-seven percent agree that retailers who accept credit cards make more profits because of

Table 7-1
Perceptions and Attitudes About Credit

Q.7i, 7j: Now I am going to read you a list of things that are of concern to some **consumers.** I want you to think about your own experience as a consumer. Please tell me, for (the high rate of interest charged on credit/difficulty in obtaining as much credit as needed), how much it has worried you personally — a great deal, somewhat, a little bit, or not at all.

Q.5f: I will read you a short list of various products and services. Please say, for each one, **how easy or difficult** it is for consumers to check prices and value, in order to **shop around** for the best buy. Is it very easy, somewhat easy, somewhat difficult, or very difficult for consumers to shop around for credit?

1982 October

		Race			Household Income						Age			
	Total	Black	His-panic	White	$7,500 or Less	$7,501-$15,000	$15,001-$25,000	$25,001-$35,000	$35,001-$50,000	$50,001 and Over	18-29 Years	30-49 Years	50-64 Years	65 and Over
Base	1,252	111	67	1,074	146	248	348	207	131	81	348	482	239	178
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Worried by difficulty in obtaining as much credit as needed														
A little bit or not at all	61	45	45	62	51	52	57	63	69	76	40	65	73	74
A great deal or somewhat	36	55	52	34	43	46	41	36	28	20	58	34	23	18
Worried by high rate of interest charged on credit														
A little bit or not at all	22	12	19	24	18	20	20	22	27	27	17	19	23	39
A great deal or somewhat	76	88	80	74	78	80	80	77	71	70	81	80	74	58
Perceived ease or difficulty in shopping around for the best buy on credit														
Very easy or somewhat easy	36	23	35	37	23	37	43	35	40	41	24	38	50	37
Very difficult or somewhat difficult	57	73	64	55	67	56	53	62	58	54	74	59	42	39

Q.6f: I will read the list of products and services again. If people **did** shop around in your area for the best buy, how much difference in value for the money do you think they would find? Would they find big differences in value for the money, small differences in value for the money, or no differences, when shopping for credit?

Q.8e: Here are some things that the government **might** be involved in now or in the future. For each, tell me whether you think the government should or should not be involved. Should or shouldn't the government decide what rate of interest lenders can charge borrowers?

Q.24: In the past twelve months, which, if any, of the following types of credit cards have you and your family used — bank cards, gasoline credit cards, department store charge cards, or travel and entertainment cards?

1982 October

		Race			Household Income						Age			
	Total	Black	His-panic	White	$7,500 or Less	$7,501-$15,000	$15,001-$25,000	$25,001-$35,000	$35,001-$50,000	$50,001 and Over	18-29 Years	30-49 Years	50-64 Years	65 and Over
Base	1,252	111	67	1,074	146	248	348	207	131	81	348	482	239	178
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Perceived difference in value for the money when shopping for credit														
Big difference	28	40	38	26	30	26	31	31	24	33	35	29	25	18
Not a big difference	62	55	57	63	54	63	61	61	73	62	62	66	62	50
Whether government should or shouldn't decide what rate of interest lenders can charge borrowers														
Government should	52	61	57	51	49	56	52	53	57	41	57	50	49	49
Government shouldn't	43	33	39	45	43	38	44	43	43	57	41	47	44	39
Credit card usage during past twelve months														
Used some	68	55	74	70	36	56	73	81	89	91	70	76	69	50
Used none	31	43	26	30	63	44	27	19	11	6	30	23	31	50

Table 7-2
Reactions to Some Statements About Credit Cards

Q.23: Now I'd like to read you some statements about credit cards. For each, please tell me whether you agree or disagree.

	1982 October								
		Used Any Credit Card Last Year		Household Income					
	Total	Yes	No	$7,500 or Less	$7,501-$15,000	$15,001-$25,000	$25,001-$35,000	$35,001-$50,000	$50,001 and Over
Base	1,252	856	388	146	248	348	207	131	81
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Being able to shop with credit cards is a great help to consumers									
Agree	58	69	35	44	51	59	65	70	74
Disagree	39	30	59	49	45	39	35	29	25
Not sure	3	1	6	7	4	2	—	1	1
Retailers who accept credit cards make more profits because of the extra business they attract									
Agree	77	79	71	73	81	81	78	77	67
Disagree	19	18	23	20	17	17	19	21	27
Not sure	4	3	6	7	1	2	4	2	6
Retailers who accept credit cards tend to charge higher prices than retailers who do not									
Agree	55	53	60	56	56	55	53	61	47
Disagree	40	44	31	30	40	42	43	37	49
Not sure	5	3	9	13	4	3	4	2	4
If retailers charge all customers the same price, they make less profit on credit card sales than they do on cash sales									
Agree	58	62	49	50	52	58	63	66	67
Disagree	36	35	40	39	42	38	34	32	30
Not sure	5	3	10	11	6	5	2	2	3
If retailers charge all customers the same price, then cash customers pay more than they otherwise would because they are helping to pay the cost of credit									
Agree	66	65	68	61	64	64	67	73	62
Disagree	31	33	26	28	34	33	33	25	35
Not sure	4	2	7	11	3	3	—	2	3
If it costs more for a retailer to handle a credit card than to accept cash, the cash customer should pay less than the credit card customer									
Agree	72	70	78	73	72	75	70	79	72
Disagree	26	29	18	24	27	25	29	21	25
Not sure	2	1	3	4	*	1	1	—	3

*Less than 0.5%.

the extra business they attract. Nonusers of credit cards are almost as likely as credit card users to agree to that, and the various income brackets do not disagree much among themselves on this point.

A perceived disadvantage of credit card usage comes in the form of higher prices. Fifty-five percent of the public think that retailers who accept credit cards tend to charge higher prices than retailers who do not. Credit card users are only slightly less likely than nonusers to agree with this, and the various income brackets are in relatively close agreement on this matter as well.

Should Credit Customers Pay More and Cash Customers Pay Less?

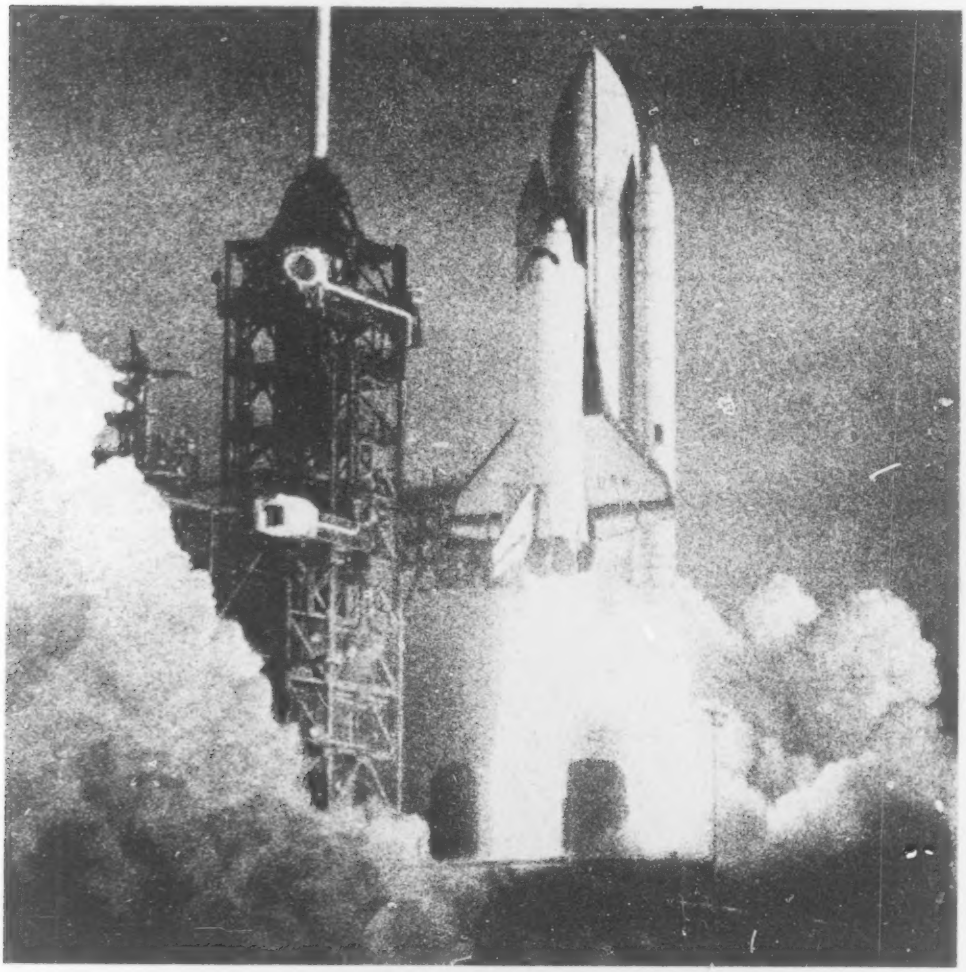
A majority of consumers believe that credit entails costs. Fifty-eight percent agree that if retailers charge all customers the same price, they make less profit on credit card sales than they do on cash sales. Credit card users are particularly convinced of this (62%), and nonusers were much less likely to agree (49%). Consumers also seem to think that cash customers help to subsidize credit card customers by bearing part of the costs of the credit system. Sixty-six percent agree that if retailers charge all customers the same price, then cash customers pay more than they otherwise would because they are helping to pay the cost of credit. Card users and nonusers do not disagree on this, nor do the various income brackets.

Consumers also seem to favor some kind of premium for credit or discount for cash. Seventy-two percent agree that if it costs more for a retailer to handle a credit card than to accept cash, the cash customer should pay less than the credit card customer. Card users are only slightly less likely than nonusers to agree with this, and all income groups agree at about the same rate.

Observation:

Consumers tend to see credit cards as a costly convenience. Their attitudes would seem to favor a mixed marketplace in which at least some retailers accept credit cards and consumers have the choice of whether or not to use them. At the same time consumers favor a system that puts more of the cost of credit onto the user and allows cash customers to pay less.

Consumerism and the Future



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Who Tends to Be Active in the Consumer Movement?

Among the rank-and-file consumers, participation in the organized consumer movement is modest. Six percent of consumers say they have at some time personally taken an active part in a consumer group. Fourteen percent of consumers say they have at some time personally contributed money to a consumer group.

The proportion of consumers who have *either* taken an active part in *or* contributed money to a consumer group is 16%. Table 8-1 shows how this varies by subgroup. Active support for the consumer movement tends to be highest among urban/suburbanites, individuals under the age of 50, individuals in the highest income bracket, college graduates, political independents, and ideological liberals. Support tends to be lowest among town and rural people, individuals aged 50 or over, those in the lower income brackets, those with least education, Democrats and Republicans, and middle-of-the-roaders and conservatives.

These two sets of groups, in their differing support of the organized consumer movement, reflect only a hint of the traditional New Deal coalitions. Rather, the issue of consumerism is one of those more recent cleavages, such as the environmental movement and the nuclear freeze movement, that cut across traditional social and political battlelines and that divide groups into new coalitions. This is underscored by the finding in Table 8-1 that Democrats and Republicans are about equal in their support of the consumer movement, and that both types of partisans are exceeded in such support by political independents.

Because the base numbers of Democrats, Republicans, and independents differ in size, their rates of support do not tell the whole story. Table 8-2 shows the partisan composition of the entire sample and of those who have actively supported the consumer movement. The consumer movement consists of people from all traditional political camps. There are Republican consumerists, Democratic consumerists, and independent consumerists. But again it is apparent that in the consumer movement both types of traditional partisans are somewhat underrepresented, while independents are overrepresented. This is consistent with an interpretation of consumerism as a movement that cuts across traditional political battlelines and that draws support from all camps, and especially from those who feel least well served by traditional parties, i.e., the independents. It is also consistent with the possibility that independents are more attracted to new types of "single issue" movements than are partisans.

The constellation of demographic groups that show active support for the consumer movement augurs well for future growth. They include some of the most established and secure groups, such as suburbanites and those in higher income brackets, who have the resources to act on their issue concerns. They include some of the most growing and emergent groups, such as college graduates and the younger generation, who will play bigger and bigger roles in the oncoming decades.

Potential Support in the Future

Table 8-1 also offers an indication of potential support for organized consumerism in the future. The survey presented a hypothetical situation and asked respondents:

"Suppose an organized consumer group in your local area decided to put pressure on retailers who sold the products of a certain manufacturer that the group felt were inferior or harmful. Do you think you would certainly support the efforts of this group, probably support them, probably not support them, or certainly not support the efforts of this group?"

The proportion who say they would "certainly support" the group is 16%, the same size as those who say they have already been active as a participant or as a contributor, though they are not all precisely the same people. However, another 49% of consumers say they would "probably support" the group. This 49% may be seen by consumer leaders as an additional pool of potential recruits for the consumer movement — if they can be reached and mobilized.

Table 8-1
Actual and Potential Support for Consumer Groups

Q.25a: Have you personally ever taken an active part in a consumer group, or haven't you?

Q.25b: Have you ever contributed money to a consumer group, or haven't you?

Q.26: Suppose an organized consumer group in your local area decided to put pressure on retailers who sold the products of a certain manufacturer that the group felt were inferior or harmful. Do you think you would certainly support the efforts of this group, probably support them, probably not support them, or certainly not support the efforts of this group?

	1982 October			
	Base		Have Been Active in or Have Contributed Money to a Consumer Group	Would Certainly or Probably Support Efforts of Local Group
Total	1,252	%	16	65
Region				
East	328	%	20	67
Midwest	333	%	15	65
West	230	%	17	66
South	360	%	15	61
Place of Residence				
City	363	%	18	67
Suburb	345	%	22	68
Town	192	%	13	62
Rural	351	%	12	59
Age				
18-29 Years	348	%	18	74
30-49 Years	481	%	19	66
50-64 Years	239	%	12	55
65 and over	178	%	13	52
Race				
Black	111	%	14	65
Hispanic	67	%	24	66
White	1,073	%	16	65
Household income				
$7,500 or less	146	%	11	52
$7,501-$15,000	248	%	11	72
$15,001-$25,000	347	%	17	67
$25,001-$35,000	207	%	19	72
$35,001-$50,000	131	%	21	63
$50,001 and over	81	%	30	62
Education				
8th Grade	75	%	11	40
High school	602	%	13	67
Some college	281	%	18	69
College graduate	289	%	23	62
Party identification				
Democrat	501	%	16	70
Independent	367	%	21	63
Republican	303	%	14	60
Political philosophy				
Liberal	251	%	23	70
Middle-of-the-road	516	%	16	69
Conservative	431	%	14	59
Those most worried about consumer concerns	511	%	17	70

Table 8-2
Partisan Composition of Supporters of the Consumer Movement

Q.F5: Regardless of how you may vote, what do you usually consider yourself — a Republican, a Democrat, an independent, or what?

	1982 October	
Party Identification	**Total**	**Have Been Active in or Have Contributed Money to a Consumer Group**
Base	1,252	200
	%	%
Democrat	41	40
Independent	28	36
Republican	24	21
Other, not sure	7	3
	100	100

In Table 8-1 the certain support and the probable support are added together, totaling 65%, and are broken down by subgroup. It is striking how widely spread potential support is across the various demographic groups. The pool of potential support approaches or exceeds the solid majority level of 60% in almost every demographic group. Exceptions are individuals aged 50 and over, those with the least education, and those in the lowest income bracket; among those groups there is a certain amount of sociodemographic overlap since they include the oldest generation, who often live on low, fixed incomes, and who grew up when advanced schooling was less common.

Observation:

Of course, the widespread potential support for the consumer movement is never likely to be totally activated or fully mobilized. People often overestimate to pollsters the extent to which they would actually participate in situations presented hypothetically, as this one was. And, of course, leadership, organization, and, sometimes, catalyzing events are necessary in order to mobilize people -- ingredients that cannot be guaranteed. But the breadth of the potential support, not just its absolute magnitude, is impressive in these results. It shows that the consumer movement has considerable potential support in virtually every social group, and that support is not now, if indeed it ever was, confined to a few social groups.

A New Idea for Funding the Consumer Movement

Table 8-3 summarizes the results of three questions posed to respondents regarding a new idea for funding the consumer movement. The idea is that, once or twice a year, companies such as electric companies or insurance companies would be required to offer consumers the opportunity to pay several dollars extra, along with their bill. The extra money would then go to an independent consumer group to defend consumer interests in that particular industry. Thirty-seven percent of consumers in the sample say it is a good idea to require such companies to make this kind of opportunity available; 58% think it is not a good idea; and 6% say it depends or they're not sure.

A variation of this idea for funding consumer advocacy has been instituted in the state of Wisconsin. The Citizens Utility Board in Wisconsin is permitted to enclose solicitations for funds in billings sent by electricity companies. The idea has gained some currency among consumer leaders in other industries such as insurance as a way to reach unorganized consumers.

One use of public opinion surveys is to try out a new policy, reform, or idea to see how much resonance it has with the public. Clearly, this method is never a totally reliable device of gauging actual public response to the eventual full scale institution of a new policy. In the survey, the respondent knows

Table 8-3
Willingness to Pay Extra to Defend Consumer Interests

Q.20: Consumer leaders in some states have proposed a new idea to raise money for the activities of consumer groups. The idea is that once or twice a year, companies such as electric companies or insurance companies would be required to offer consumers the opportunity to pay several dollars extra along with their bill. The extra money would then go to an independent consumer group to defend consumer interests in this particular industry. Do you think it's a good idea or not a good idea to require such companies to make this kind of opportunity available?

Q.21: Suppose that plan existed in your state and your electric company was required to make that opportunity available to you. Would you, or wouldn't you, pay three dollars every six months if the money went to a group that would defend the interests of electricity customers?

Q.22: How about when you buy a new car? Would you, or wouldn't you, pay twenty-five dollars extra when you buy a new car if the money went to a group that would defend the interests of car buyers?

	1982 October						
		Preferred Amount of Regulation in General			Perceived Impact of Consumer Activists		
	Total	More	Same	Less	Done Great Good	Done Some Good	Done Harm
Base	1,252	263	422	512	146	902	157
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Requiring companies to make funding opportunity available							
Good idea	37	50	40	28	52	36	29
Not a good idea	58	44	56	68	40	59	70
Depends (volunteered)	3	2	3	2	5	2	—
Not sure	3	3	2	2	3	2	1
Willingness to pay extra to defend the interests of electricity customers							
Yes, I would	55	74	56	44	68	56	40
No, I would not	37	21	36	48	24	37	54
Depends (volunteered)	6	5	7	6	7	6	5
Not sure	2	*	1	2	1	2	1
Willingness to pay extra to defend the interests of car buyers							
Yes, I would	45	57	47	39	56	45	40
No, I would not	49	38	46	55	37	48	57
Depends (volunteered)	3	3	4	3	4	4	*
Never buy a new car (volunteered)	1	1	2	1	2	1	1
Not sure	2	1	1	2	1	2	2

*Less than 0.5%

mainly what the pollster presents about the policy. In real life, the respondent will probably gain first-hand experience with the new policy and also hear what other people have to say for and against it. Nonetheless, such a trial balloon can often be instructive to policymakers and strategists in anticipating eventual support or opposition.

In the case of the consumer advocacy fund plan, the public's initial reaction is about 3:2 against. This is a nationwide reaction, of course, which could be quite different in various states and localities. Opinion about the new idea seems to derive in part from people's view of regulation in general as well as their view of the impact of the consumer movement. People who prefer "less" regulation as a general principle are much more likely to oppose the new funding idea. People who are skeptical about whether the consumer movement has done much good are also likely to oppose the new funding idea.

It is therefore surprising that the subsequent two questions in Table 8-3 reveal considerable personal willingness to pay extra to defend consumer interests.

Willingness to Pay Extra to Defend Consumer Interests

As shown in Table 8-3, 55% of consumers say they would pay three dollars every six months along with their electric bill, if the money went to an independent group that would defend the interests of electricity customers. Forty-five percent of consumers say they would pay twenty-five dollars extra when they buy a new car if the money went to an independent group that would defend the interests of car buyers. In both cases, opinion once again is related to people's views on regulation and on the consumer movement. The more people prefer regulation as a general principle, the more willing they are to pay extra for consumer advocacy. The more good that people see as having been done by the consumer movement, the more willing they are to pay extra for consumer advocacy.

Who Is Willing to Pay Extra to Defend Consumer Interests?

Table 8-4 indicates who is most willing to pay for consumer advocacy. Willingness is *highest* among those under the age of 30, Blacks and Hispanics, Democrats, liberals, those most worried over consumer problems, and those who are impatient with the regulatory status quo. By education, willingness tends to be highest in the middle education groups. Willingness is steady across all income brackets in the case of electricity; in the case of new cars, it increases somewhat in the highest income bracket and decreases in the lowest. Willingness tends to be *lowest* in the Midwest, among individuals aged 50 and over, among those with both the most and the least education, among conservatives and Republicans, and among those most satisfied with the regulatory status quo.

Observation:

Why, in these questions, are substantially more people willing to say that they would pay extra for consumer advocacy than are willing to say that the idea is a good one in the first place? Perhaps the answer to this seeming contradiction lies in the element of compulsion that enters into the first question about the general idea but not into the following two questions about personal willingness. Companies would be required to send the fund solicitation with their billings. Customers would have a choice of whether or not to contribute. Not everyone who is willing to contribute is also willing to force companies to make the opportunity available.

These data offer to both sides some strategic insights into future disputes. By emphasizing the considerable public willingness to take advantage of such plans once instituted, proponents can communicate their issue appeals in a form that has the most resonance with consumers. By emphasizing the compulsory nature of most such plans, opponents can make their issue appeals on the grounds of those aspects of the plans consumers seem most reluctant to endorse.

Table 8-4
Who Is Willing to Pay Extra to Defend Consumer Interests

Q.21: Suppose that plan existed in your state and your electric company was required to make that opportunity available to you. Would you, or wouldn't you, pay three dollars every six months if the money went to a group that would defend the interests of electricity customers?

Q.22: How about when you buy a new car? Would you, or wouldn't you, pay twenty-five dollars extra when you buy a new car if the money went to a group that would defend the interests of car buyers?

	1982 October			
	Base		Would Pay Extra to Defend Electricity Customers	Would Pay Extra to Defend Car Buyers
Total	**1,252**	%	**55**	**45**
Region				
East	328	%	58	47
Midwest	334	%	49	38
West	230	%	56	51
South	360	%	57	48
Age				
18-29 Years	348	%	67	57
30-49 Years	482	%	53	46
50-64 Years	239	%	43	37
65 and over	178	%	50	34
Race				
Black	111	%	64	49
Hispanic	67	%	62	52
White	1,074	%	53	44
Household income				
$7,500 or less	146	%	58	38
$7,501-$15,000	248	%	58	48
$15,001-$25,000	348	%	57	48
$25,001-$35,000	207	%	50	45
$35,001-$50,000	131	%	54	44
$50,001 and over	81	%	57	50
Education				
8th Grade	75	%	45	41
High school	602	%	58	49
Some college	281	%	57	50
College graduate	290	%	49	36
Party identification				
Democrat	501	%	60	52
Independent	368	%	54	44
Republican	303	%	50	39
Political philosophy				
Liberal	251	%	61	51
Middle-of-the-road	517	%	58	46
Conservative	431	%	50	44
Those most worried about consumer concerns	511	%	60	53
Perceived adequacy of government regulation to protect consumers				
It is about right	340	%	48	35
It has not done enough	532	%	61	53

Groups and Consumerism: A Special Look at Black Consumers, Female Consumers, Senior Citizen Consumers, and Others

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The Black Consumer

Blacks are much more likely than whites to be concerned about consumer problems and to think there has been deterioration in the environment facing the consumer. Sixty-three percent of Blacks say they have worried "a great deal" about a majority of the consumer problems investigated by this survey; only 38% of whites have been similarly worried. Blacks see deterioration of conditions in the marketplace (31%) almost twice as frequently as they see progress (17%). Whites have perceptions that are almost the reverse, seeing progress (29%) twice as often as they see decline (14%) (Table 9-1).

Blacks have a somewhat more favorable balance of opinion regarding Ralph Nader (33% positive, 18% negative) compared to whites' view of Nader (40% positive, 36% negative), but twice as many Blacks (50%) as whites (24%) feel they don't know enough about Nader to evaluate him. Over 80% of Blacks think the Reagan Administration is not doing a good job in consumer protection, and 43% of Blacks think Reagan has actually tried to weaken consumer protection. White attitudes are somewhat kinder to the Reagan Administration.

Blacks are as likely as whites (80% vs. 83%) to think the organized consumer movement has done some good in the past, and Blacks are almost as likely as whites (61% vs. 67%) to think the movement has grown stronger in the past five years. But a majority of Blacks (55%) think current leaders and spokesmen of the consumer movement tend to be "out of touch" with consumers, while only 42% of whites think so.

Blacks are about twice as likely as whites (38% vs. 18%) to prefer "more" government regulation as a general principle. And Blacks are also much more likely than whites (61% vs. 39%) to believe that the regulatory status quo "has not done enough" to protect the consumer.

When it comes to the cost of regulation, Blacks on balance tend to see the extra costs as being worthwhile, but no more so (57%) than do whites (61%). Blacks are divided on whether extra costs due to pressure from the consumer movement are worth it, and Blacks are somewhat less likely (45%) than are whites (55%) to answer in the affirmative.

Blacks are about as likely as whites to report active support for a consumer group in the past (14% vs. 16%). And they are also as likely as whites to say they would support a local consumer pressure group in the future (65% vs. 64%). Blacks seem slightly more willing than whites to pay extra to defend the interests of electricity customers (64% vs. 53%), a gap that narrows when it comes to advocacy for new car buyers (49% vs. 44%).

Observation:

The overall picture of Black consumers that emerges from these figures is one of a group that seems particularly vulnerable to and concerned about consumer problems, that is an ally of those who press for more government regulation, that endorses the achievements of the consumer movement and its leaders in the past, but that does not feel quite so well served by the movement today as it might be. Potential support for the movement is quite strong in the Black community. But Blacks are not so sure that current consumer leaders are in touch with Black concerns. In fact, 55% of Blacks say that consumer leaders today are "out of touch."

The Female Consumer

Women are more likely than men to be worried about consumer concerns and they are less likely than men to see progress in the marketplace. Forty-five percent of women say they have worried "a great deal" about a majority of the consumer problems surveyed; only 38% of men report that they have been similarly worried. Thirty-one percent of men see mainly progress in the marketplace during the past decade; only 24% of women see such progress (Table 9-1).

Women have a more favorable balance of opinion about Ralph Nader (42% positive, 26% negative) than do men (36% positive, 42% negative). But men and women are in virtual agreement when it comes to the Reagan Administration's record on consumer protection.

Table 9-1
Consumerism by Race, Sex, and Age

	1982 October					
	Race		Sex		Age (Two Groups or Generations)	
	Black	White	Female	Male	18-29 Years	65 Years and Over
Base	111	1,074	646	606	348	178
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Concern about consumer problems						
Those most worried about consumer concerns	63	38	45	38	45	31
Perceived change in consumer environment in the past ten years						
Mainly progress	17	29	24	31	29	18
Mainly deterioration	31	14	18	15	15	24
Ratings of those involved in consumer protection						
Rate Ralph Nader						
Positively	33	40	42	36	30	40
Negatively	18	36	26	42	30	28
Don't know/not sure	50	24	32	22	40	31
Perceptions of the Reagan Administration's actions concerning consumer protection						
Has tried to strengthen	12	22	21	21	19	20
Has made no changes	42	44	42	45	48	39
Has tried to weaken	43	24	25	27	29	23
Views of the organized consumer movement						
Perceptions of people active in the consumer movement						
They have done good	80	83	84	82	85	75
They have done harm	17	13	11	15	13	16
Perceived growth of the consumer movement						
It has grown stronger	61	67	66	65	73	60
It has grown weaker	34	25	26	27	24	25
Perceptions of consumer leaders						
They reflect consumers' feelings	33	47	47	44	50	40
They are out of touch	55	42	43	47	45	39

(continued)

Table 9-1 (continued)
Consumerism by Race, Sex, and Age

	1982 October					
	Race		Sex		Age (Two Groups or Generations)	
	Black	White	Female	Male	18-29 Years	65 Years and Over
Base	111	1,074	646	606	348	178
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Government intervention and regulation						
Preferred amount of government regulation as a general principle						
More	38	18	21	21	28	16
Same	32	34	35	31	39	33
Less	22	44	37	45	31	40
Perceived adequacy of government regulation to protect consumers						
It is about right, mainly	18	28	26	27	24	21
It has not done enough, mainly	61	39	47	38	44	47
The cost of consumerism						
Perceived impact of government regulation on prices						
It is worth extra cost	57	61	61	62	71	50
It is not worth extra cost	37	34	34	34	27	38
Perceived impact of the consumer movement on prices						
It is worth extra cost	45	55	53	56	64	39
It is not worth extra cost	44	40	41	40	35	45
Activism and support						
Have been active in or have contributed money to a consumer group	14	16	16	17	18	13
Would certainly or probably support local pressure group	65	64	66	63	75	52
Would be (are) willing to pay $3 to defend interests of electricity customers	64	53	58	52	67	50
Would be (are) willing to pay $25 to defend interests of car buyers	49	44	46	44	57	34

Women do not differ much from men in their assessments of the good or the harm done by the consumer movement, or in their perceptions of growth in the movement over the past five years. Men and women are similarly divided over whether consumer leaders are out of touch.

Women are not as likely as men to opt for reduced government regulation as an abstract principle (37% vs. 45%). With regard to specific instances of protective government regulation, women are more likely than men to say the government hasn't done enough to protect the consumer (47% vs. 38%).

Men and women do not disagree much over the costs of consumerism. Both tend to think the extra costs are worth it.

Women and men indicate that they would support a local consumer pressure group in about the same percentages. Women are slightly more likely (58%) than men (52%) to pay extra for consumer advocacy in defense of the interest of electricity customers. Men and women are in more agreement when it comes to advocacy for car buyers.

Observation:

The picture of women consumers that emerges from the survey differs only occasionally from that of their male counterparts. This is not too surprising, since most men and women spend most of their lives together in the same households or family units and, thus, experience similar consumer environments. One might expect the objective consumer environment, and thus the subjective consumer experience, to differ more by indices such as place of residence, income bracket, race, or age, than by sex.

Nonetheless, women appear to be more sensitive to consumer problems and less satisfied that these problems are being solved. Women seem to be more likely to think the government should be doing more to protect consumers, and they are slightly more willing than men to pay extra for consumer advocacy.

The Senior Citizen as Consumer

Individuals over the age of 65 seem less concerned than people under the age of 30 about consumer problems. Thirty-one percent of the oldest generation say they have worried "a great deal" about a majority of the consumer problems that the survey investigated; 45% of the youngest age group report such worries. On the other hand, the two age groups differ in the opposite way when it comes to their sense of progress or decline in the consumer marketplace. Among young people, reports of progress (29%) outnumber perception of decline (15%), while among senior citizens a sense of deteriorating marketplace (24%) is more frequent than a sense of progress (18%) (Table 9-1).

Senior citizens hold a more favorable balance of opinion about Ralph Nader (40% positive, 28% negative) than do young people (30% positive, 30% negative). More young people feel they don't know enough about Nader. The two generations do not differ much on whether or not the Reagan Administration is doing a good job or on whether it is strengthening or weakening consumer protection.

The over-65 age group is a bit less sanguine about the impact of the consumer movement; 75% of them think the movement has done some good whereas 85% of young people say so. The older generation is also less inclined to perceive growth in the movement in the past five years: 60% of them report growth in the movement while 73% of their juniors report such growth. The oldest age group is also less inclined than are the under-30s to believe that consumer leaders reflect consumers' feelings (40% vs. 50%).

On the matter of government regulation as a general principle, senior citizens are more likely than young people to favor reduced regulation (40% vs. 31%). But when it comes to specific cases of protective regulation, the two generations do not disagree with each other.

Senior citizens are less likely than young people (50% vs. 71%) to think the benefits of government regulation to be worth the extra cost. The same pattern holds for the benefits due to pressure from

the consumer movement; 39% of senior citizens feel them to be worth the cost, while 64% of young people do.

The oldest generation is slightly less likely than the youngest generation to have been an active supporter of a consumer group (13% vs. 18%). Senior citizens also tend to be less likely to support a local consumer pressure group in the future (52% vs. 75%). Seniors are also less willing than are their juniors to pay for consumer advocacy in the electricity industry (50% vs. 67%) or in the auto industry (34% vs. 57%).

Observation:

The picture of senior citizens that emerges from these data is that of a group with a certain skepticism. They seem less convinced than are younger people that there has been progress in the marketplace, that the impact of the consumer movement is good, that government regulation is desirable, and that the benefits of consumerism are worth the cost. Accordingly, they are less willing to join, support, or pay for efforts along these lines.

To some extent this combination of skeptical views may reflect the natural perspective of a generation brought up in a different era, when consumerism was not so important or so familiar an issue on the national agenda. If so, then senior citizens also might be expected to have reservations about other new issues or movements that likewise have emerged and grown only recently.

However, in part this combination of skeptical views may also reflect the natural perspective of all generations as they grow older, leave the workforce, retire on a smaller and often fixed income, and often (but not always) withdraw from social currents and public affairs issues. Reduced income alone might make one less likely to endorse new regulations, new pressure campaigns, or new costs. And many formerly acceptable costs may begin to seem less worthwhile as a person scales back his or her lifestyle, priorities, and budget during retirement.

Table 9-2 summarizes attitudes not only of the above groups, but also of many other groups discussed throughout this report, on eleven indicators of consumerism. The bottom line in the table presents the number of instances (out of a total of eleven) in which each group showed more support for consumerism than did the general population. Thus, groups with the most consistently proconsumerist tendencies include young people, urban/suburbanites, Blacks, liberals, and Democrats. Groups with the least proconsumerist tendencies include town and rural dwellers, whites, the older generation, conservatives, and Republicans. These two groupings represent coalitions familiar since New Deal times: vulnerable or emergent groups vs. more secure or established groups.

But some additional groups take sides on consumerism in ways that suggest that this issue cuts across the older New Deal cleavages. As shown in the bottom line of Table 9-2, income groups as well as education groups divide over consumerism in ways that are not familiar from the New Deal era. In four instances the lower income groups display the most proconsumerist stance; however, in five other instances the upper income groups show the most proconsumerist tendencies. In three cases, the groups with less education prove to be the most proconsumerist, but in six other cases groups with the most education are most proconsumerist.

Labor union households, traditionally a core of the New Deal coalition, today look little different from the population as a whole on a majority of consumerism indicators.

In general, the lower income and lower education groups are proconsumerist when it comes to having worries about consumer problems, perceiving deterioration in the marketplace, and preferring more government regulation and protection. These are consistent with classic New Deal themes. The higher income and the higher education groups are more proconsumerist when it comes to matters such as

Table 9-2
Summary of Group Attitudes on Eleven Indicators of Consumerism

1982 October

	Race		Sex		Age		Income		Education		Place of Residence		Labor Union Households	Political Philosophy			Political Party			Relevant Table in Report
	Black	White	Female	Male	Younger	Older	Lower	Higher	Lower	Higher	Urban/ Suburban	Town/ Rural		Liberal	Middle-of-the-Road	Conservative	Democrat	Independent	Republican	
Worry a great deal over consumer concerns	+	–	+	–	+	–	+	–	–	–	+	–	0	+	–	–	+	0	–	1-2
Perceive deterioration in the marketplace	+	–	+	–	–	+	+	–	+	–	0	0	0	+	0	0	+	0	–	1-4
See good done by consumer movement	0	0	0	0	0	–	–	+	–	+	+	–	+	+	0	0	+	0	–	3-2
See movement growing stronger	0	0	0	0	+	–	0	0	–	+	+	–	0	–	+	–	–	+	0	3-3
Think movement leaders reflect consumers' feelings	–	+	0	0	+	–	–	+	–	+	0	–	0	0	+	–	0	+	–	3-5
Give positive rating to Ralph Nader	+	0	+	–	–	+	–	+	–	+	+	–	+	+	0	–	+	0	–	2-2
Prefer more regulation as a general principle	+	–	0	0	+	–	+	–	+	–	+	–	0	+	0	–	+	–	–	4-2
Say Government has not done enough to protect the consumer in specific areas	+	–	+	–	0	0	+	–	+	–	+	–	+	+	0	–	+	0	–	4-5
Think extra costs for quality and safety are worth it	–	0	0	0	+	–	–	+	–	+	0	0	+	+	+	–	0	+	0	5-3 5-4
Personally active in, or coniributed to, consumer group	0	0	0	0	+	–	–	+	–	+	+	–	0	+	0	0	0	+	0	8-1
Willing to pay extra for consumer advocacy	+	–	+	–	+	–	0	0	–	–	0	0	0	+	0	–	+	0	–	8-4
Ratio of total number of + marks showing support for consumerism	6:1		5:0		7:2		4:5		3:6		7:0		4	9:3:0			7:4:0			

Note: Each group's degree of consumerism compared to the public at large is denoted: + = More consumerist than entire public
0 = About the same as entire public
– = Less consumerist than entire public

perceived achievements of the consumer movement, praise of consumer leaders, belief that extra costs for quality and safety are worthwhile, and personal involvement in consumer group activities. These tend to be more middle class patterns.

Two other groups that divide over consumerism in ways that are not familiar from the New Deal are men and women. Until recently, women's attitudes did not often appear to be different from men's on issues in public opinion polls. But women are often more proconsumerist than men, and consumerism is one of a growing number of issues on which there is such a "gender gap."

Finally, another sign that consumerism is not an issue in the traditional New Deal mold is shown by the way ideological and partisan groups divide over it. A legacy from New Deal days is shown in Table 9-2 in the fact that liberals and Democrats tend to be proconsumerist, while conservatives and Republicans tend to be much less so inclined. But the tantalizing finding is that ideological middle-of-the-roaders and partisan independents are occasionally the most proconsumerist of all. Thus the middle of the spectrum sometimes outpoints both ends of the spectrum.

Aspects of consumerism that divide Democrats vs. Republicans and liberals vs. conservatives in traditional, familiar ways include worry over consumer problems, perceived deterioration of the marketplace, government regulation and protective intervention, willingness to pay extra for advocacy, perceived impact of the consumer movement, and rating of Nader. Aspects on which ideological middle-of-the-roaders and partisan independents tend to be the most proconsumerist include perceived growth in the consumer movement, praise of consumer leaders, belief that the costs of consumerism are worth it, and, for the independents, personal involvement in consumer groups.

Observation:

These findings underscore the conclusion that while consumerism is an issue that draws on traditional political camps it also cuts across those older divisions and draws people together into new and different coalitions. In particular, consumerism draws support from higher income, better educated people, and independents and middle-of-the-roaders to a degree that distinguishes it as a new kind of social and political movement.

Appendix A: Methodology

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The data for *Consumerism in the Eighties* are based on responses from 1,252 adults across the United States interviewed by telephone from October 15 through October 26, 1982. As with virtually all of the hundreds of telephone surveys conducted by the Harris organization each year, the study is based on a modified stratified random digit dialing method. Harris samples are based on an area-probability approach rather than on a single-stage sample.

There are three important advantages to using an area-probability sample:

— It allows greater stratification of the population (Harris samples have sixteen strata).

— It allows comparisons with census data and other published demographic information that have a geographic base.

— It is compatible with sampling for in-person interviewing, thus providing greater versatility in study design.

The sample is developed in a multistage process. First, a listing is constructed of the latest estimates of the adult population of every state within each region in rank order, and then a running cumulative total of gross sums is produced. Next, a skip factor is calculated as t/n, where t is the adult population of the stratum and n is the number of sample points needed. Then a random number, smaller than the skip factor, is selected. Beginning with the random number, the sample points are then assigned according to where the skip factor falls on the running cumulative total of the adult population within that stratum. This same procedure is then applied to each state within each region to form primary selection units (PSU's).

At the next stage of selection, one telephone number for each PSU is randomly selected from the updated Harris library of telephone directories. The selected numbers are then altered by dropping the last 2 digits (in central city and suburban areas) or the last 3 digits (in towns and rural areas) and replacing them with randomly selected numbers. As many 2- or 3-digit randomly selected numbers as needed are appended until a working residential number is reached or until an interview is completed. Technically, this method of sampling produces an epsem sample of all published banks, where the sampling fraction $f = n/N$ for all elements in all strata.

The efficiency of this approach is discussed by Cooper and Metzger (1972) who estimate that "only about 1 dialing in 30 would result in a useful residential connection" when all 7 digits are selected randomly. However, when banks of actual assigned numbers (the first 4 of the 7-digit number) are specified, and the remaining 3 digits selected randomly, approximately 2 dialings in 3 would result in such a "useful residential connection." Hence, the efficacy of this approach seems well established.

In telephone surveys, the use of this random-digit dialing method offers two important advantages:

— The sample is highly representative.

— Unlisted telephone numbers have the same probability of inclusion in the sample as listed numbers. This is particularly important in reaching both high-income and minority populations. For example, in some sections of the city of Chicago, unlisted residential phones account for about 40% of all residential connections.

Stratification of Telephone Sample. As indicated above, the core telephone exchanges are stratified by two variables — geographic region and place of residence. We divide the United States into four regions as follows:

1. **East:** Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, District of Columbia, and West Virginia.

2. **South:** Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana, Texas, and Oklahoma.

3. **Midwest:** Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota, and North Dakota.

4. **West:** Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, Idaho, Nevada, California, Oregon, Washington, Alaska, and Hawaii.

We also use four categories for place of residence:

1. **Central City:** Every place defined as a central city by the Bureau of the Census.

2. **Suburb:** Every place that is not a central city but is within an urbanized area as defined by the Bureau of the Census.

3. **Town:** Every city, town, or village that is not an urbanized area, but is within the SMSA (Standardized Metropolitan Statistical Area) boundaries.

4. **Rural:** Every place that is not included in any of the other three categories.

We then define each place of residence category within each region as a stratum.

National Cross Section. Louis Harris and Associates national surveys are based on a national sample of the civilian population of the United States 18 years of age and older. Alaska and Hawaii are not represented, nor are individuals in prisons, hospitals, or religious or educational institutions. Samples are based on census information on the population of each state in the country. These figures are updated by intercensal estimates produced annually by the Bureau of the Census, and sample locations are selected biennially to reflect changes in the country's demographic profile. National samples are stratified in two dimensions — geographic region and metropolitan vs. nonmetropolitan residence. Stratification ensures that the sample will be representative of within 1% of those living in the United States in different regions, and in SMSA's and in non-SMSA's. Within each stratum the selection of the primary sampling unit is achieved through multistage unclustered sampling. Each PSU yields one interview. First states, then counties, then minor civil divisions are selected with probability proportioned to census estimates of their respective populations.

Sample Reliability. In order to maintain reliability and confidence in the sample, the telephone field staff follows these steps when a respondent contact is attempted.

1. A nonanswering telephone is dialed three times per day over a three-day period. At the end of this time, if no contact is made, a new telephone number is generated.

2. If a business telephone is reached or if contact is made with a household in which a potential respondent presents a language barrier, a new telephone number is generated.

3. Once a residential contact is established, the interviewer uses a respondent selection procedure to choose someone in the household for the interview. If a chosen respondent refuses to be interviewed, a new telephone number is generated and the screening process is repeated.

Respondent Selection. Within each household contacted for the survey, the interviewers use a respondent selection procedure to choose which adult member of the household will be interviewed. Under the standardized procedure the interviewer asks for one of the following household members in order of priority: (1) youngest adult male at home; (2) oldest adult male at home; (3) youngest adult female at home; and (4) oldest adult female at home. This procedure yields a proper sex quota and produces a good age distribution on respondent selection.

Callback Strategy. In order to attain the highest possible response rates within reasonable cost constraints, callbacks are made according to the following guidelines:

No answer/not-at-homes: An initial call and then three callbacks to reach an adult member of the household. Callbacks are made on different days and at different times of the day. After the fourth call, the household is replaced.

Refusals: One callback for a refusal conversion. If after the conversion attempt the designated respondent still refuses the interview, another household is selected.

Table A-1
Composition of the Sample

	1982 October		
	Number In Sample	Unweighted Percentage	Weighted Percentage
Base	1,252	100 %	100 %
Region			
East	328	26	26
Midwest	334	27	26
West	230	18	19
South	360	29	29
Place of residence			
City	364	29	30
Suburb	345	28	28
Town	192	15	15
Rural	351	28	28
Sex			
Female	646	52	52
Male	606	48	48
Race			
Black	111	9	10
Hispanic	67	5	5
White	1,074	86	84
Age			
18-29 Years	348	28	30
30-49 Years	482	38	34
50-64 Years	239	19	20
65 and over	178	14	15
Education			
8th Grade	75	6	7
High school	602	48	48
Some college	281	22	22
College graduate	290	23	23
Household income			
$7,500 or less	146	12	14
$7,501-$15,000	248	20	17
$15,001-$25,000	348	28	20
$25,001-$35,000	207	17	18
$35,001-$50,000	131	10	12
$50,001 and over	81	6	10
Party identification			
Democrat	501	40	41
Independent	368	29	28
Republican	303	24	24

76 **Busy signals:** An initial call and three callbacks to reach a member of the household. Callbacks are made on different days and at different times of the day. If a busy signal is still reached after the fourth call, a new number is selected and the household is replaced.

All interviews were conducted by the National Center for Telephone Research, the telephone interviewing division of Louis Harris and Associates.

Weighting

The achieved sample is then weighted to population parameters on sex, race, age, and income. This brings these key factors into line, where necessary, with their actual proportions in the population. Usually only mild weighting is necessary. Table A-1 shows the composition of the achieved sample in the *Consumerism in the Eighties* project both before and after weighting.

Trend Data

Where trend data are shown, every effort has been made to ensure comparability. In some instances, including the 1976 study, interviewing was conducted in person instead of by telephone.

Appendix B:
The Questionnaire

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Louis Harris and Associates, Inc.
630 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10111

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY: **77**

Questionnaire No.:

Study No. 822047

5-6-7-8

October 1982

Sample Point No. _____

10-11-12-13-14-15-16

Interviewer: _____ Date: _____

Telephone No. _____

17-18-19-20-21-22-23-24-25-26

Hello, I'm _____ from Louis Harris and Associates, the national research firm in New York. We're conducting a survey about some issues of importance in this country today and would like to ask you some questions.

Are you 18 years of age or older? (IF NO, ASK IF ANYONE IN HOUSEHOLD IS 18 YEARS OLD OR OLDER AND ASK TO SPEAK WITH THAT PERSON. IF NO ONE IN HOUSEHOLD IS 18 OR OLDER, SCREEN OUT.)

Yes ..... _____ (CONTINUE WITH QUESTIONNAIRE)
No ..... _____ (NONELIGIBLE)
Refused ..... _____ (REFUSAL)

FROM OBSERVATION: Sex

Male .....(28(48 -1
Female .....52 -2

1. I'd like to have your views on how some things have changed in the last ten years. **Compared to ten years ago,** would you say that (READ EACH ITEM).

START AT "X"	Improved/ Better	Worse	No Change (Vol.)	Not Sure
( ) a. The quality of most products and services has **improved** or grown **worse**	(29(31 -1	59 -2	7 -3	3 -4
( ) b. The safety of most products has **improved** or grown **worse**	(30(62 -1	27 -2	6 -3	5 -4
( ) c. Most companies have gotten **better** or **worse** at handling the complaints of consumers	(31(45 -1	39 -2	6 -3	10 -4
( ) d. Labeling and information about products have gotten **better** or **worse**	(32(80 -1	13 -2	4 -3	3 -4
( ) e. Consumers get a **better** or **worse** deal in the marketplace	(33(31 -1	54 -2	6 -3	9 -4
( ) f. Consumers' shopping skills have gotten **better** or **worse**	(34(79 -1	15 -2	3 -3	3 -4
( ) g. The value you get for your money on most goods and services has gotten **better** or **worse**	(35(17 -1	76 -2	4 -3	3 -4

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2. Now I'm going to read you a number of statements. For each, would you tell me if you agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly? (READ EACH ITEM).

START AT "X"	Agree Strongly	Agree Somewhat	Disagree Somewhat	Dis-agree Strongly	Nei-ther Agree Nor Dis-agree (Vol.)	Not Sure
( ) a. Most companies do a good job of providing reasonable products at fair prices	(36(14 -1	48 -2	23 -3	12 -4	1 -5	1 -6
( ) b. If companies were left to themselves and not regulated by government, the consumer would get a much worse deal	(37(33 -1	23 -2	23 -3	17 -4	1 -5	2 -6
( ) c. On the whole, government regulation has done a good job of protecting the interests of consumers	(38(20 -1	41 -2	22 -3	14 -4	1 -5	2 -6
( ) d. On the whole, government regulation has done more to help business than to protect the consumer	(39(23 -1	30 -2	26 -3	15 -4	2 -5	4 -6
( ) e. Competition among companies is the best way to keep prices down ..	(40(60 -1	23 -2	8 -3	8 -4	0 -5	1 -6
( ) f. Competition often drives out the small companies in an industry so that only big companies survive	(41(45 -1	26 -2	16 -3	11 -4	0 -5	1 -6
( ) g. Competition among companies is the best way to insure a wide variety of products and services	(42(54 -1	31 -2	10 -3	4 -4	0 -5	1 -6
( ) h. Many of the safety problems which people have with products arise because they don't read the instructions properly	(43(57 -1	31 -2	7 -3	4 -4	0 -5	1 -6

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3. In the future, do you think there should be more government regulation of business, less government regulation, or the same amount as there is now?

More	(44(21	-1
Less	41	-2
Same	33	-3
Not sure	5	-4

4. Here are some different ways people can find out about the products they buy. Please say, for each one, how reliable you think it usually is — very reliable, somewhat reliable, not very reliable, or not at all reliable? (READ EACH ITEM).

START AT "X"	Very Reliable	Somewhat Reliable	Not Very Reliable	Not At All Reliable	Not Sure
( ) a. Advice from friends and relatives about products	(45(27 -1	52 -2	16 -3	4 -4	1 -5
( ) b. Consumer news coverage in magazines and newspapers	(46(19 -1	60 -2	15 -3	4 -4	2 -5
( ) c. Advertising by manufacturers	(47(9 -1	52 -2	31 -3	7 -4	1 -5
( ) d. Information from the manufacturer on or inside the package	(48(32 -1	54 -2	10 -3	2 -4	1 -5
( ) e. Articles in independent consumer magazines like *Consumer Reports*	(49(48 -1	39 -2	6 -3	3 -4	5 -5
( ) f. Advice from retailers about the products they sell	(50(11 -1	61 -2	22 -3	5 -4	1 -5
( ) g. Consumer news coverage on television and radio	(51(19 -1	54 -2	20 -3	5 -4	2 -5

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5. I will read you a short list of various products and services. Please say, for each one, **how easy or difficult** it is for consumers to check prices and value, in order to **shop around** for the best buy. Is it very easy, somewhat easy, somewhat difficult, or very difficult for consumers to shop around for (READ EACH ITEM).

ASK IN THIS ORDER	Very Easy	Somewhat Easy	Somewhat Difficult	Very Difficult	Not Sure
a. Food	(52(42 -1	27 -2	21 -3	9 -4	1 -5
b. New cars	(53(28 -1	27 -2	24 -3	17 -4	4 -5
c. Gasoline	(54(41 -1	27 -2	19 -3	11 -4	2 -5
d. Electrical appliances	(55(34 -1	35 -2	22 -3	8 -4	1 -5
e. Doctors	(56(11 -1	13 -2	30 -3	44 -4	2 -5
f. Credit	(57(18 -1	18 -2	33 -3	24 -4	7 -5

6. I will read the list of products and services again. If people **did** shop around in your area for the best buy, how much difference in value for the money do you think they would find? Would they find big differences in value for the money, small differences in value for the money, or no differences, when shopping for (READ EACH ITEM).

ASK IN THIS ORDER	Big Differences	Small Differences	No Differences	Not Sure
a. Food	(58(29 -1	62 -2	8 -3	1 -4
b. New cars	(59(37 -1	44 -2	13 -3	6 -4
c. Gasoline	(60(24 -1	63 -2	11 -3	2 -4
d. Electrical appliances	(61(31 -1	53 -2	12 -3	4 -4
e. Doctors	(62(40 -1	33 -2	20 -3	7 -4
f. Credit	(63(28 -1	44 -2	18 -3	10 -4

7. Now I am going to read you a list of things that are of concern to some **consumers.** I want you to think about your own experience as a consumer. Please tell me, for each one, how much **it has worried** you personally — a great deal, somewhat, a little bit, or not at all. (READ EACH ITEM).

START AT "X"	A Great Deal	Somewhat	A Little Bit	Not at All	Not Sure
( ) a. The poor quality of many products	(64(51 -1	29 -2	12 -3	7 -4	1 -5
( ) b. The high prices of many products	(65(67 -1	21 -2	7 -3	4 -4	1 -5
( ) c. The failure of many companies to live up to claims made in their advertising	(66(39 -1	36 -2	14 -3	11 -4	1 -5
( ) d. Too many products breaking or going wrong soon after you bring them home	(67(46 -1	29 -2	13 -3	11 -4	1 -5
( ) e. Too many products which are dangerous	(68(40 -1	27 -2	16 -3	16 -4	1 -5
( ) f. Misleading packaging or labeling	(69(39 -1	27 -2	20 -3	13 -4	1 -5
( ) g. Failure of companies to handle complaints properly	(70(39 -1	30 -2	17 -3	13 -4	1 -5
( ) h. The poor quality of after-sales service and repairs	(71(49 -1	27 -2	14 -3	9 -4	1 -5
( ) i. Difficulty in obtaining as much credit as you need	(72(18 -1	18 -2	16 -3	45 -4	3 -5
( ) j. The high rate of interest charged on credit	(73(59 -1	17 -2	7 -3	15 -4	2 -5
( ) k. Inadequate guarantees or warranties	(74(36 -1	31 -2	18 -3	14 -4	1 -5

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8. Here are some things that the government **might** be involved in now or in the future. For each, tell me whether you think the government should or should not be involved. Should or shouldn't the government (READ EACH ITEM).

START AT "X"

	Should	Shouldn't	Not Sure
( ) a. Approve new toys for safety before they come on the market	(10(88 -1	10 -2	1 -3
( ) b. Decide whether television advertisements are misleading and should not be shown	(11(67 -1	31 -2	2 -3
( ) c. Forbid mergers and acquisitions of companies that government officials think would reduce competition	(12(50 -1	43 -2	7 -3
( ) d. Prevent manufacturers who produce products from operating stores that sell those products	(13(36 -1	58 -2	7 -3
( ) e. Decide what rate of interest lenders can charge borrowers	(14(52 -1	43 -2	5 -3
( ) f. Approve new drugs before they are allowed to be sold	(15(94 -1	5 -2	1 -3
( ) g. Control the prices of consumer products	(16(36 -1	61 -2	3 -3

9a. Do you think that government regulation is about right, has gone too far, or has not done enough in trying to protect the consumer against **products that are dangerous**? RECORD BELOW.

9b. Do you think that government regulation is about right, has gone too far, or has not done enough in trying to protect the consumer against **misleading packaging and labeling?** RECORD BELOW.

9c. Do you think that government regulation is about right, has gone too far, or has not done enough in trying to protect the consumer against **inadequate guarantees and warranties**? RECORD BELOW.

9d. Do you think that government regulation is about right, has gone too far, or has not done enough in trying to protect the consumer against **companies that fail to live up to their advertising claims**? RECORD BELOW.

	Q. 9a Dangerous Products	Q. 9b Packaging and Labeling	Q. 9c Guarantees and Warranties	Q. 9d Advertising
About right	(17(37 -1	(18(42 -1	(19(40 -1	(20(32 -1
Gone too far	12 -2	7 -2	5 -2	5 -2
Not done enough	48 -3	48 -3	51 -3	59 -3
Not sure	3 -4	3 -4	4 -4	4 -4

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10. On balance, do you think that government regulation of business has resulted in higher prices, lower prices, or has made no difference in prices?

Higher prices	(21(61	-1
Lower prices	6	-2
No difference	29	-3
Not sure	5	-4

11a. In the past few years, several industries have been deregulated, which means that government regulations have been reduced. Because of deregulation, since 1978, **airlines** have not been subject to government price controls. Airlines can now decide for themselves what services to offer and what prices to charge. Overall, do you think this has been good or bad for the consumer?

Good for consumers	(22(58	-1
Bad for consumers	35	-2
Both (volunteered)	1	-3
No change (volunteered)	1	-4
Not sure	5	-5

11b. Because of deregulation, since 1981, **oil companies** have not been subject to government price controls. Oil companies can now decide for themselves what prices to charge for gasoline. Overall, do you think this has been good or bad for the consumer?

Good for consumers	(23(30	-1
Bad for consumers	67	-2
Both (volunteered)	1	-3
No change (volunteered)	1	-4
Not sure	1	-5

12. Now I would like to ask you some questions about "**the consumer movement,**" a phrase that has been used to describe the people and organizations who have worked to change products, or services, or advertising, or prices, or after-sales service to give consumers what they consider would be a better deal.

On the whole, do you think that the leaders and spokesmen of the consumer movement (READ EACH PAIR OF PHRASES).

ASK IN THIS ORDER.

a. Reflect consumers' feelings ..... (24(45 -1
or
Are out of touch with consumers ..... 45 -2
Not sure ..... 10 -3

b. Are troublemakers ..... (25(24 -1
or
Are not troublemakers ..... 62 -2
Not sure ..... 15 -3

c. Genuinely want to help consumers ..... (26(62 -1
or
Are only concerned about helping themselves ..... 30 -2
Not sure ..... 8 -3

d. Are reasonable in their criticisms and demands ..... (27(58 -1
or
Are unreasonable in their criticisms and demands ..... 31 -2
Not sure ..... 11 -3

e. Consider the cost of what they are asking for ..... (28(40 -1
or
Do not consider the cost of what they are asking for ..... 49 -2
Not sure ..... 11 -3

13. Overall, do you feel that people active in the consumer movement have done a great deal of good, some good, some harm, or a great deal of harm?

A great deal of good ..... (29(12 -1
Some good ..... 71 -2
Some harm ..... 10 -3
A great deal of harm ..... 3 -4
Had no effect (volunteered) ..... 1 -5
No sure ..... 3 -6

14. In the last five years, do you think that the consumer movement has grown stronger or weaker?

Stronger	(30(66	-1
Weaker	26	-2
No change (volunteered)	2	-3
Not sure	6	-4

15. On balance, do you think that the demands by the consumer movement have resulted in higher prices, lower prices, or have made no difference in prices?

Higher prices	(31(45	-1
Lower prices	11	-2
No difference	39	-3
Not sure	5	-4

16. I am going to read you the names of different groups and people. Please tell me, for each one, how good or bad a job they have done in protecting the interests of consumers -- whether they have done an excellent job, a pretty good job, only a fair job, or a poor job — or do you know nothing about them? (READ EACH ITEM).

ASK IN THIS ORDER.	Excellent	Pretty Good	Only Fair	Poor	Know Nothing	Not Sure
a. The Federal Government	(32(2 -1	31 -2	43 -3	12 -4	11 -5	1 -6
b. Private industry	(33(2 -1	24 -2	40 -3	17 -4	16 -5	1 -6
c. Your state government	(34(3 -1	26 -2	42 -3	18 -4	10 -5	1 -6
d. The Better Business Bureau	(35(15 -1	39 -2	23 -3	10 -4	11 -5	1 -6
e. Ralph Nader	(36(12 -1	27 -2	22 -3	12 -4	25 -5	2 -6
f. The Consumer Product Safety Commission	(37(8 -1	36 -2	22 -3	4 -4	29 -5	1 -6
g. The Environmental Protection Agency	(38(9 -1	36 -2	29 -3	14 -4	12 -5	1 -6
h. The Federal Trade Commission	(39(3 -1	22 -2	30 -3	9 -4	34 -5	2 -6
i. Consumers' Union, which publishes *Consumer Reports* magazine	(40(18 -1	38 -2	17 -3	3 -4	22 -5	1 -6
j. The Reagan Administration	(41(6 -1	22 -2	31 -3	35 -4	6 -5	1 -6
k. The U.S. Congress	(42(2 -1	17 -2	43 -3	28 -4	8 -5	2 -6

17. Changes in products or services, which have been made as a result of pressure from the consumer movement to improve their quality and safety, often raise prices. Do you think the changes are or are not generally worth the extra cost?

Generally worth extra cost	(43(54	-1
Generally not worth extra cost	41	-2
Not sure	5	-3

18. Government regulation of business to improve the quality and safety of products sometimes raises prices. Do you think such changes in quality and safety are or are not generally worth the extra cost?

Generally worth extra cost	(44(61	-1
Generally not worth extra cost	34	-2
Not sure	5	-3

19. From what you've read or heard, has Ronald Reagan's Administration tried to **strengthen** consumer protection, or has it tried to **weaken** consumer protection, or has the Reagan Administration not made any changes in the consumer protection area?

Reagan tried to strengthen	(45(21	-1
Reagan tried to weaken	26	-2
Not made any changes	44	-3
Not sure	9	-4

20. Consumer leaders in some states have proposed a new idea to raise money for the activities of consumer groups. The idea is that once or twice a year, companies such as electric companies or insurance companies would be required to offer consumers the opportunity to pay several dollars extra along with their bill. The extra money would then go to an independent consumer group to defend consumer interests in that particular industry. Do you think it's a good idea or not a good idea to require such companies to make this kind of opportunity available?

Good idea	(46(37	-1
Not a good idea	58	-2
Depends (volunteered)	3	-3
Not sure	3	-4

21. Suppose that plan existed in your state and your electric company was required to make that opportunity available to you. Would you, or wouldn't you, pay three dollars every six months if the money went to a group that would defend the interests of electricity customers?

Yes, I would	(47(55	-1
Not, I would not	37	-2
Depends (volunteered)	6	-3
Don't pay for/use electricity (volunteered)	0	-4
Not sure	2	-5

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22. How about when you buy a new car? Would you, or wouldn't you, pay twenty-five dollars extra when you buy a new car if the money went to a group that would defend the interests of car buyers?

Yes, I would	(48(45	-1
No, I would not	49	-2
Depends (volunteered)	3	-3
Never buy a new car (volunteered)	1	-4
Not sure	2	-5

23. Now I'd like to read you some statements about credit cards. For each, please tell me whether you agree or disagree. (READ EACH ITEM).

(ASK IN THIS ORDER)	Agree	Disagree	Not Sure
a. Being able to shop with credit cards is a great help to consumers	(49(58 -1	39 -2	3 -3
b. Retailers who accept credit cards make more profits because of the extra business they attract	(50(77 -1	19 -2	4 -3
c. Retailers who accept credit cards tend to charge higher prices than retailers who do not	(51(55 -1	40 -2	5 -3
d. If retailers charge all customers the same price, they make less profit on credit card sales than they do on cash sales	(52(58 -1	36 -2	5 -3
e. If retailers charge all customers the same price, then cash customers pay more than they otherwise would because they are helping to pay the cost of credit	(53(66 -1	31 -2	4 -3
f. If it costs more for a retailer to handle a credit card than to accept cash, the cash customer should pay less than the credit card customer	(54(72 -1	26 -2	2 -3

24. In the past twelve months, which, if any, of the following types of credit cards have you and your family used — bank cards, gasoline credit cards, department stores charge cards, or travel and entertainment cards? (MULTIPLE RECORD.)

Have used:

Bank	(55(40	-1
Gasoline	32	-2
Department store	52	-3
Travel and entertainment	17	-4
Other (volunteered) (SPECIFY) _____	1	-5
None/haven't used any	31	-6
Not sure	1	-7

25a. Have you personally ever taken an active part in a consumer group, or haven't you?

Have taken active part	(56(6	-1
Haven't taken active part	94	-2
Not sure	0	-3

25b. Have you personally ever contributed money to a consumer group, or haven't you?

Have contributed	(57(14	-1
Haven't contributed	84	-2
Not sure	2	-3

26. Suppose an organized consumer group in your local area decided to put pressure on retailers who sold the products of a certain manufacturer that the group felt were inferior or harmful. Do you think you would certainly support the efforts of this group, probably support them, probably not support them, or certainly not support the efforts of this group?

Certainly support	(58(16	-1
Probably support	49	-2
Probably not support	19	-3
Certainly not support	9	-4
Depends (volunteered)	5	-5
Not sure	2	-6

TO BE ASKED OF EVERYONE

F1. What type of work does the main wage earner of this household do?

DESCRIBE JOB BRIEFLY:

Professional	(59(18	-1
Manager, official	10	-2
Proprietor (small business)	5	-3
Clerical worker	4	-4
Sales worker	5	-5
Skilled craftsman, foreman	12	-6
Operative, unskilled laborer (except farm)	13	-7
Service worker	6	-8
Farmer, farm manager, farm laborer	3	-9
Student	1	-0
Housewife	1	-x
Military service	1	-y
Unemployed	(60(2	-1
Retired	16	-2
Welfare	0	-3
Disabled	1	-4
Other (SPECIFY) _____	0	-5
Not sure/refused	1	-6

F2. How old are you? IF HESITANT, READ LIST.

18 to 20	(61(8	-1
21 to 24	10	-2
25 to 29	12	-3
30 to 34	11	-4
35 to 39	9	-5
40 to 49	14	-6
50 to 64	21	-7
65 and over	15	-8
Refused	0	-9

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F3. What was the last grade of school you completed?

No formal schooling	(62(0	-1
1st through 7th grade	3	-2
8th grade	3	-3
Some high school	13	-4
High school graduate	35	-5
Some college	15	-6
Two-year college graduate	7	-7
Four-year college graduate	14	-8
Postgraduate	9	-9
Trade/technical/vocational after high school*	XXXXXX	
Refused	0	-0

*INTERVIEWER: ASK FOR DETAILS, AND CODE INTO ONE OF THE ABOVE CATEGORIES.

F4. Are you a member of a labor union, or is anyone else in this household a member of a labor union? MULTIPLE RECORD IF NECESSARY.

Self is member	(63(14	-1
Other is member	9	-2
No union member in household	76	-3
Not sure	1	-4

F5. Regardless of how you may vote, what do you usually consider yourself — a Republican, a Democrat, an independent, or what?

Republican	(64(24	-1
Democrat	42	-2
Independent	28	-3
Other	3	-4
Not sure	3	-5

F6. How would you describe your own personal political philosophy — conservative, middle-of-the-road, or liberal?

Conservative	(65(35	-1
Middle-of-the-road	41	-2
Liberal	20	-3
Not sure	4	-4

F7. Which of the following income categories best describes your total 1981 household income? Was it (READ LIST)?

$7,500 or less	(66(14	-1
$7,501 to $15,000	17	-2
$15,001 to $25,000	21	-3
$25,001 to $35,000	18	-4
$35,001 to $50,000	12	-5
$50,001 or over	10	-6
Not sure/no answer/refused	8	-7

F8. Are you of Hispanic origin or descent, or not?

Yes, of Hispanic origin	(67(5	-1
No, not of Hispanic origin	90	-2
Not sure/refused	5	-3

F9. Do you consider yourself white, Black, Oriental, or what?

White	(68(85	-1
Black	11	-2
Oriental/Asian or Pacific Islander	1	-3
American Indian or Alaskan native	1	-4
Not sure/refused	2	-5

Thank you very much for your cooperation!

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